

THE  
EARNEST ATHEIST  
A STUDY OF SAMUEL BUTLER

by  
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*To H. T. M.*

*With Gratitude and Affection*

*O Critics, Cultured Critics !  
Who will praise me after I am dead,  
Who will see in me both more and less than I intended,  
But who will swear that whatever it was it was all  
perfectly right ;  
You will think you are better than the people who,  
when I was alive, swore that whatever I did was  
wrong,  
And damned my books for me as fast as I could write  
them ;  
But you will not be better, you will be just the same,  
neither better nor worse,  
And you will go for some future Butler as your fathers  
have gone for me ;  
Oh, how I should have hated you !*

*But you, Nice People !  
Who will be sick of me because the critics thrust me  
down your throats,  
But who would take me willingly enough if you were  
not bored about me,  
Or if you could have the cream of me—and surely this  
should suffice ;  
Please remember that, if I were living, I should be on  
your side,  
And should hate those who imposed me either on myself  
or others ;  
Therefore, I pray you, neglect me, burlesque me, boil  
me down, do whatever you like with me,  
But do not think that, if I were living, I should not  
aid and abet you ;  
There is nothing that even Shakespeare would enjoy  
more than a good burlesque of Hamlet.*

*(“ To Critics and Others ”)*

## INTRODUCTION

"Above all things let no unwary reader do me the injustice of believing in me. In that I write at all I am among the damned."  
(*Life and Habit*)

It is more as a portent than for anything he wrote or thought that Samuel Butler must be regarded as one of the most significant figures of the latter part of the last century. His own generation ignored him. His fame was almost wholly posthumous. In so far as he was known at all in the flesh it was as an oddity, an eccentric with a number of queer bees in his bonnet, as that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman, that the credit for formulating the Theory of Evolution must go rather to Erasmus Darwin, Buffon and Lamarck than to Charles Darwin, and that habit, not chance, was the chief factor in producing variations. His painting, to which he devoted a great deal of time, was with one exception—his picture "Family Prayers"—too mediocre to merit serious attention; his musical compositions, to which he also devoted much time, were scarcely even mediocre; his books, apart from *Erewhon*, which he published anonymously, were ignored or slated, more often ignored, and each was in smaller demand than the last. His death in 1902 attracted as little notice as his life.

Yet a few years later his reputation had swollen to immense proportions. His autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, published in 1903, was hailed as a masterpiece; his friend

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Festing Jones wrote a two-volume *Life*, in which his smallest doings and sayings were meticulously recorded; his Note-Books, in which he had jotted down his thoughts from day to day over a large number of years, were published and appreciatively received, and even his scientific works were re-issued and shared in the general revival of interest in him. He was presented by his many admirers as the first great exploder of Victorian hypocrisy, the pioneer rebel and inveigher against cant, as one who successfully and courageously undermined the most cherished contemporary institutions, and who, in drawing a satirical, yet authentic, picture of the family life of a country clergyman, had exposed the appalling insincerity of family life as such. In their opinion he was a wholesome wind blowing away the stuffiness of a hypocritical age, clean thought invading the dreary habitations of tepid superstition and self-interested humbug, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way for Bernard Shaw!"

This view of him still persists. "It was Samuel Butler," Mr. Joad writes, "who first laughed at the gods of Victorian England; it was Samuel Butler who thawed that first tiny hole in the icy crust of Victorian morality, through which were soon to pour the floods of Shavian invective; it was Samuel Butler who first took the portentous lay figure of Victorian complacency by the throat and shook it until the stuffing came out. . . . He pricked the bubbles, the reputations popped, and the mischievous laughter of the schoolboy was heard in the background." Others, however, have grown sceptical about this process of shaking the stuffing

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out of the portentous lay figure of Victorian complacency. A conviction has grown on them that the floods of Shavian invective are fountain-like, ornamentally sprinkling the source whence they came, and that the only stuffing Butler and his like shook out was their own.

The revolt against Victorianism, in fact, has come to seem only the crowning unreality of that unreal time; the final elaboration, the final fantasy that brought the whole structure tumbling down, to lie now rotting on the ground. This necessitates a revaluation of Butler. Did he draw aside the curtains of his father's rectory, letting in daylight; or hang still thicker ones, plush curtains, making even more extravagant shadows than the others, a chillier twilight that bred more fabulous dreams? Was he, not so much the Anti-Victorian, as the Ultimate Victorian, fleeing more frenziedly and further afield even than his contemporaries did; where they buried their appetites under deep layers of sentimentality, trying to abolish his altogether; outdoing their pattern of domestic felicity with another of solitary felicity; stuffing ideas, instead of conventions, into the mouth of passion to silence it; laying up treasure not even of gold, but of paper money.

Like his fellow-Victorians, the deepest need of his nature was to escape from the reality of his own existence; only he escaped by means of ideas, and they by means of emotions. He was a pioneer ideologue. His mind was his refuge; and he lived secure amongst its shadows and fantasies. Where for instance Dickens shaped his turbulent appetites into creatures of darkness and light, making a melodrama of them,

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Butler shaped his into thought and made a utopia of them. His utopia was Erewhon, Nowhere, a quiet twilit place where banks were churches, doctors priests, and disease alone evil. It has very largely come to pass. Waiting at a bank-counter faces are reverent; and angels glow with health, not holiness—airmen or potent gamekeepers; and the psycho-analyst, or, as Butler called him, Straightener, ministers to all who travail and are heavy-laden; and virtue is assessed in public health statistics.

He created his Nowhere like any god—Let there be this, let there be that! The trick has caught on—Let there be peace, let there be progress. Whatever horrified, why, pluck it out! If his soul offended, pluck that out; if his appetites, pluck them out, too. A fellow-reader in the British Museum Reading Room, Karl Marx, adopted a similar technique. He, too, god-like, created and abolished, and his Nowhere has also come to pass. It is a strange fact that at a time when so many prophetic voices were being noisily raised, the future should have lain with these bearded, morose two, so that to-day they have their capitals, Moscow and Geneva, with the world almost divided between them.

Having created his Nowhere Butler had to give it a Law. A Promised Land filled in the space he had cleared between himself and the horizon; but the tablets of stone were still unwritten on, the Covenant had still to be drawn up and ratified. Darwinism met his need. Oh, the joy that came to him when he laid down *The Origin of Species* after his first reading of it! What had seemed incomprehensible became com-

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prehensible, what had terrified was now unformidable; chaos a pattern, and that pattern securely in his mind. He rolled up his sleeves. He got to work, not indeed in a laboratory, or even in the fields, but in the British Museum Reading Room. There he mastered the subject, first whimsically abolishing the superstitious debris of the past, then laying firm foundations for the future; thought placed on thought, orderly, impregnable. He soon left Darwin as far behind as the Thirty-Nine Articles. Darwin believed in chance, and chance was outside the Law. Chance had been abolished along with Heaven and Hell. It was as fiendish as speculation. Fixed-interest-bearing securities, trustee stock, for him. From *amœba* to *homo sapiens*, yes; but not just as the gentle wind doth blow, inevitably like compound interest; and not stopping at *homo sapiens*, on and on and on and on, and up and up and up and up, until *homo supersapiens*, supermen.

Men of science were resentful. Who was this amateur to come breaking in on their preserve? Why, he had never so much as been inside a laboratory, never handled a specimen or peered down a microscope or warmed up a test-tube, never studied fauna and flora. They forgot that the matter in hand had nothing to do with anything that ever was on sea or land. It was abstract, Erewhonian, as unconnected with life as an oil share with oil. To complain that Butler had never been in a laboratory was as unreasonable as complaining that a theologian had never been in a church. Brilliantly, ingeniously, he elaborated his theory, that habit and not chance produced variations, and that



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the spur thereto was an innate urge to progress, like the innate urge of office-boys to become managing-directors, back-bench Members of Parliament Cabinet Ministers, private soldiers generals, down-at-heel scribblers oracular men-of-letters, all mankind healthy, wealthy and wise. The *Zeitgeist* worked in him; and, expounding it, he laid about him with a heavy hand, confident that, though scorned and rejected while alive, recognition would sometime come. His confidence was justified. In the brave new world that the *Zeitgeist* produced he was acknowledged a prophet.

However much he might reduce the pressure of living, his own personal life went on. He did not manage to evolve himself creatively into an idea. A residue of unidealised living remained. Not much of a residue—"I get up about seven and immediately, in my nightshirt, go into my sitting-room and light my fire. I put the kettle on and set some dry sticks under it so that it soon heats enough to give me warm water for my bath. At eight I make my tea and cook my breakfast—eggs and bacon, sausages, a chop, a bit of fish or whatever it may be, and by 8.30 I have done my breakfast and cleared it away. Then I read *The Times* newspaper which takes me about 40–45 minutes. At 9.15 I do whatever little bits of work I can till Alfred comes at 9.30 and tells me all about the babies and whatever else interests him. We arrange what he is to do for the morning and I get away to the British Museum as quickly as I can; I am there about 10.15–10.30, according as I have any marketing to do or no. I work at the Museum till one. . . . Then I go out and dine either at



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home or at a restaurant, but I never have more than one plate of meat or vegetables and no soup or sweets. I find the less I eat the better for me. Alfred and I generally waste half an hour or so till about 2.30 or three, settling this, that or the other. From three till five or 5.30 I write letters or work at home while Alfred type-writes for me . . . and at four we always have a cup of tea together. At 5.30 I have my real tea, which consists generally of a bit of fish and bread and butter, and after that I may smoke. I may smoke after four if anyone comes or if I have to go calling anywhere, but never otherwise. From six till eight I am alone and quiet. . . . At eight I almost always go to Jones, unless he comes to me. . . . At 9.30 I leave him, come home, have some bread and milk, play two games of patience, smoke a cigarette and go to bed about eleven." Even so, this residue, such as it was, remained.

It was not quite as bare as it looked. Hate enlivened it; a grudge worked on it, engendering *The Way of All Flesh*. As Butler imposed his own pattern on the outside world so he imposed a pattern on the life within him. He hated his father, and therefore fatherhood was hateful. It was the Law that sons should hate fathers and fathers sons. Theobald and Christina, his father and mother in *The Way of All Flesh*, were fatherhood and motherhood, and Ernest, himself, new life painfully shaking itself free of the old, struggling to achieve a better and separate existence. This, too, was the *Zeitgeist*. How joyously resentful sons seized on the doctrine! They might hate their fathers with impunity; more, it was their nature, their duty, so to do.

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The great Youth bubble began to blow itself up; the great idea that not the meek but the young inherit the earth, to start on its triumphant course. And why stop at father and son? What of husband and wife? Was not that an irksome relationship? The same doctrine applied to matrimony. If Ernest rightly gave up Theobald and Christina for Truth's sake, so might Theobald give up Christina or Christina Theobald. It might even be right to become, if not eunuchs, at least homosexual for the sake of the Kingdom of Truth. *The Way of All Flesh* has borne a rare progeny of young men and women living their own lives in their own way in their own rooms and in front of their own gas-fires; of earnest promiscuity—he matters to her, she matters to him, may matter, once mattered, matters no longer, mattering and not mattering and perhaps mattering; of poets in coloured shirts who love one another, and are Communists, and sing of the worker in his factory, the miner in his mine; of quiet, kindly, solitary persons who take each other's arms, and smile meekly as the kettle boils for tea, and go for country walks discussing the League of Nations on their way; of other novels—how many other novels! which empty out the insides of their authors as Butler, in *The Way of All Flesh*, emptied out his inside, dissecting relationships, streaming consciousness.

In the end Nowhere became Everywhere. Erewhon, revisited, was just like Clifford's Inn, in the same way that Overton in *The Way of All Flesh*, living his complacent, orderly life, with his pattern for living, buying milk rather than keeping a cow, was just like Butler. Erewhonian railways were started; the Bank of England

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became a Musical Bank, and men supermen. The ideal and the real coalesced, became one, so that Butler, looking at a row of books he had written, could glow with fatherhood, and grow food to eat by compound interest, letting his capital sprout it. He lived quietly and amiably enough in this twilight formed by the merging of the ideal and the real, constantly sharpening the one faculty he exercised—thought; ideas vivacious shadows along his path, and in his heart the certainty that as surely as lower organisms, wanting to become him, had become him, so would he, wanting to become what he admired—"big and very handsome . . . impossible to imagine a more agreeable and lively countenance . . . good at cricket and boating, very good natured, singularly free from conceit, not clever but very sensible . . . father and mother drowned when he was only two years old . . . heir to one of the finest estates in the South of England—" would become what he admired.

This superman vein has turned out to be rich indeed, richer even than he anticipated. And how zealously has it been worked! Two paths led Butler to it. His sense of personal inferiority made him transfigure into supermen all who possessed the qualities he felt he lacked; and his horror at having put down God made him enthrone Man in God's seat. He looked wistfully at whoever was unlike himself, seemingly unafraid of what terrified him, movements and manners easy, clothes well cut, knowing without the boredom of laborious study, sinning as unself-consciously as breathing, secreting money as effortlessly as glands their fluids, and

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saw in him a higher form of life; Darwinism, amended to become creative evolution, held out a promise that this higher form of life was within the reach even of such as he, in the same way that Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* held out a promise that wealth was within the reach even of the poor.

Butler's supermen have multiplied, too, at an astonishing rate. Did he occasionally, a quiet orderly person himself, realise their potentialities, catch a prophetic glimpse of what was in store for a world whose hopes were scaled to its own dimensions? Once when he and Jones were on their way by omnibus from Campo Felice to Collesano they noticed that the driver of the omnibus "was one of the handsomest young men I ever saw, aged about 19, little and quiet as a cat, and, I should say, as unreliable and not so clean. It was a lovely morning about the end of May; the ride inland towards the mountains was through an enchanting country, innumerable goldfinches flitted about among the flowers by the roadside, nothing could be more enjoyable, and the driver made friends with us at once and began to sing. He sang '*La vita e un dolor se to m'abbondona.*' He . . . must have repeated the line two or three hundred times, always to the same wailing and semi-, or more than semi-barbarous melody. Every other minute out it came at the top of his voice, which, as Jones said, was choking with emotion and yesterday's garlic. He was like a half-tamed panther, an absolutely pagan creature, but, as I have said, of the most extraordinary physical beauty, which was nevertheless repellent rather than attractive by reason of its heartlessness. As for morals,

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I should not think he knew the meaning of the word."

Jones and Butler shuddered, looked away, but felt again the irresistible attraction of his physical beauty, so heartless, so unmoral and ungentlemanly. How terrible it was not to know the meaning of the word "morals"! They knew its meaning all right. How shocking to be heartless! They were not heartless. Their perturbation was the greater when the omnibus driver gave them a taste of his nature; he "no sooner saw the provisions than he began to say that he must have some, and the moment he saw my horn drinking-cup he said that, if I chose, I was at liberty to make him a present of it. He had no more conscience or scruple than a magpie. Then he saw Jones's drinking-cup and said that he would rather have that than mine, and, it being plain that we should have no peace till we had given it him, we let him have it; but I had some work to make him give me back mine. He did not thank us for the cup, nor yet for the hearty meal with which we stuffed him."

Gingerly they fed him, like children feeding bears at the Zoo, and let him mulct them of their drinking-cups, thankful to get off so lightly. How grateful they were when they arrived at their destination, rushed off gratefully to examine old walls and a mediæval castle, noted with approval a paragraph in the *Giornale di Sicilia* announcing their visit to Collesano! If they had only known, glancing fearfully at the omnibus driver they were glancing fearfully at the future. It was like a parlour revolutionary watching strikers demonstrating, and suddenly, with a pang of cold fear, wondering: Suppose it really

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happened, suppose the venom and the fury of the mob were unleashed, brick torn from brick, life held cheap, violence raging!—my endowment policy, so laboriously subscribed? My exposure of the armament trade, shortly to be published, and at five shillings instead of seven-and-six so that it will reach the masses?—shuddering, as Jones and Butler shuddered as they looked sidelong at the heartless beauty of the omnibus driver, hurrying back to his books and his typewriter as they hurried to their old walls and mediæval castle. They glanced into the future, and it frightened them. Other supermen loomed up, not gentlemen and moral like themselves, but coarse and heartless. Did their souls become prophetic for a moment? Did they see, before the paragraph in the *Giornale di Sicilia* soothed them back into the present, superminds building a super-world, building such despairing chaos, such cocksure mediocrity, that the super-body, or super-phallus, was turned to for relief, so that the omnibus driver with his garlic breath, and extraordinary physical beauty, and magpie conscience, seemed preferable, not only to themselves, but to the whole production of creative evolution; then the mob taking a hand on its own account, producing its supermen, washing them into power, cowering ecstatic at their feet, worshipping itself in them?

Butler foreshadowed so much. His hand is in nursery school classes being taught the facts of life, no “mysteries where nature had made none” and therefore no “ambush of young days”; in birth-control clinics ladling out the sterility he loved; in the blithe companionship of comradely loves. His spirit dwells in clergymen with nick-



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names drowning unbelief in earnestness—"Does any man of science believe that the present orthodox faith can descend many generations longer without modifications? Do I—does any free-thinker who has the ordinary feelings of an Englishman—doubt that the main idea underlying and running through the ordinary faith is essentially sound? . . . Tell me that Jesus Christ died upon the Cross, and I find not one tittle of evidence worthy to support the assertion. Tell me that therefore we are to pull down the Church and turn everyone to his own way, and I reject this as fully as I reject the other. I want the Church as much as I want free-thought. . . ." His authentic voice speaks still, bidding the tide of human folly and bestiality and ecstasy to hold back because mind has conceived a quieter and more orderly pattern; his Promised Land has many mansions now wherein are "troops of young men and maidens crowned with flowers and singing of love and youth and wine."

One great change has, however, taken place. The Promised Land, as he envisaged it, had a single absolute—money. All else was changing; gods came and went; fecundity became no more than a handclasp; life climbed upwards to aerial regions where it was as impalpable as thought; but still there was money. He blew, and lo! mountains of misguided faith melted like snow, an eternity of chaos formed comprehensible order, the seven humbugs of Christendom stood revealed, the veil of the Temple was rent and its foundations shaken; but compound interest endured. He felt secure in the shadow of compound interest, indifferent alike to Heaven

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and Hell and his own fleshly being as long as accounts kept by double-entry were valid.

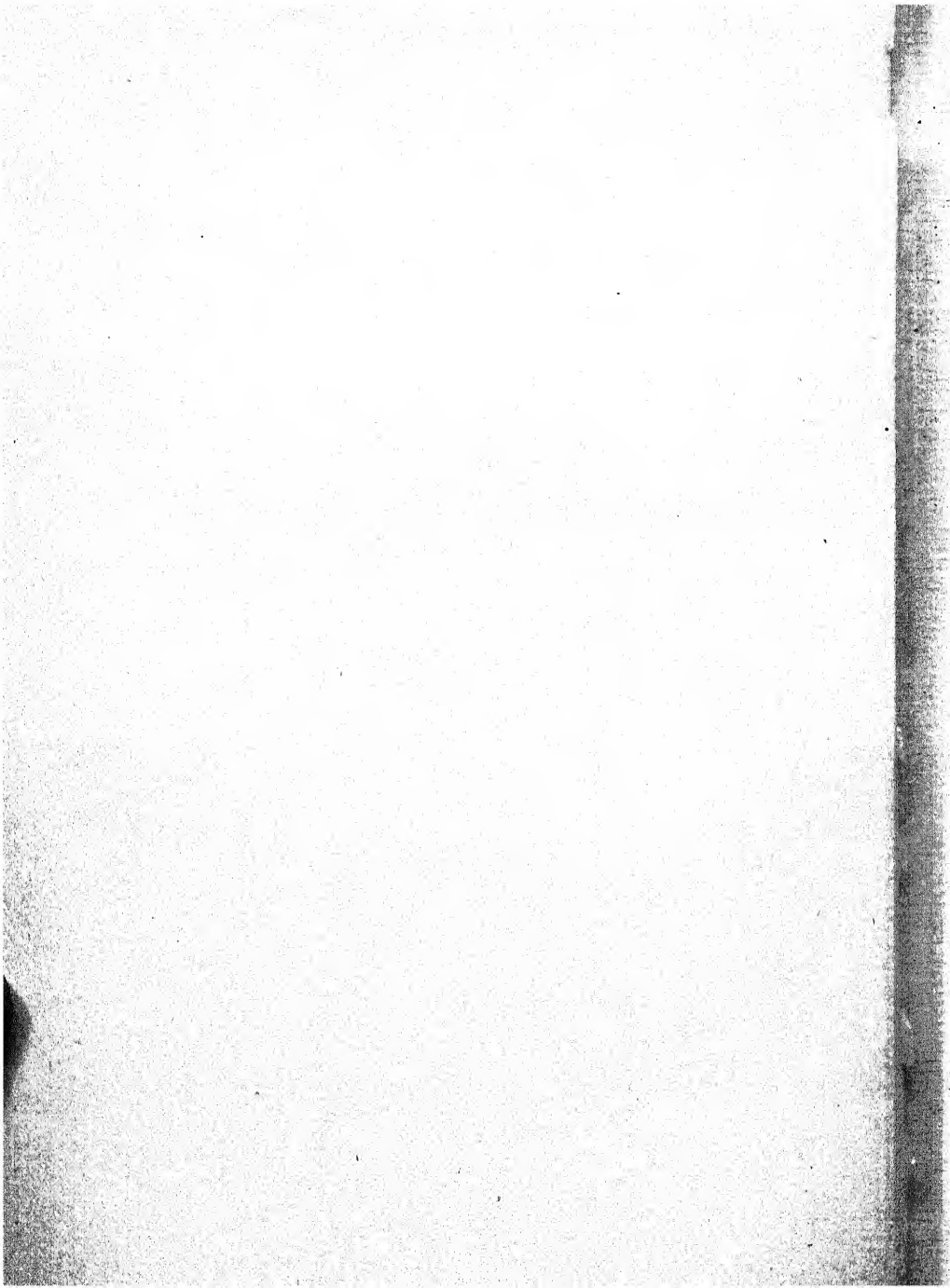
Now his absolute has taken on the same changeful quality as the rest. His Kingdom's single prop has collapsed. Money, too, like living organisms, has begun to go up and up and up. There have been super-currencies as well as supermen, and doubts have arisen about compound interest as earnest as Butler's about the Thirty-nine Articles. It alters the whole significance of his life—all shadow-fighting until the climax, the longed-for moment when his father died, and he laid hands on an inheritance in which he had implicit trust. What would he have felt if his inheritance had been brushed aside as lightly as he brushed aside the bond between parent and child, man and woman, present and past, time and eternity? How strange if the same uncertainty had gnawed at him about it as about the existence of a God! What havoc then!

This havoc has come to pass. Butler, living amidst desolate and desecrated temples of an abolished faith, insistence of abolished appetites, shrieks of souls tormented in an abolished Hell and demanding an abolished Heaven, clung to money. Now money too has been abolished, and his Promised Land become a wilderness, with, for content, only the fitful play of mind, cold light reflecting hate's heat—that's nothing. We are sprung from Butler's loins, and watching him is watching our begetting.



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# I

## BUTLER AND HIS FAMILY

“ If in my books, from *Erewhon* to *Luck or Cunning* ? there is something behind the written words which the reader can feel but not grasp—and I fancy that this must be so—it is due, I believe, to the sense of wrong which was omnipresent with me, both in regard to Pauli, the Darwins and my father, and also to my omnipresent anxiety as regards money.”

BUTLER was born in Langar Rectory on December 4, 1835. His father and grandfather had both been clergymen. The house haunted Butler all his life. He painted it, and described it, and talked about it—a heavy, sullen, changeless house, whose wall-paper and carpets slowly, imperceptibly, faded, whose furniture grew shiny, but not rickety, with age, in which a staleness accumulated, the flavour of innumerable, slow afternoons, of time stretching, a waste, between one meal and another. The whole pace of the house was slow. Its routine moved as ponderously as the Rector's sermons. Thought and bodies and conversation, even laughter, were all graceless. Butler was, from the beginning, aware of this gracelessness. The memory of it was hateful to him, because he felt himself to be part of it. He felt that the quality of the place had worked into the texture of his skin; more, that it was the womb wherein his spirit had been formed and had quickened. The hunger for vivacity and grace and joy that was in him, his sensuality, made him resent so graceless an environment.

He felt about it as Dickens did about his early childhood, that it had stunted and deformed him, and, like Dickens, abandoned himself to gusts of self-pity, morbidly brooding on a wretched, puny Ernest Pontifex, ceaselessly whipped and bullied, in the same way that Dickens brooded on a wretched, puny David Copperfield miserably washing bottles in a blacking warehouse.

Butler's father, Canon Butler, had not wanted to be a clergyman. He had been bullied into being one by his father, Dr. Samuel Butler, for many years headmaster of Shrewsbury, and then Bishop of Lichfield. His own idea had been to go into the Navy, but, like Theobald in *The Way of All Flesh*, he had inertly let his father have his way, and become ordained. He was a grotesque sort of priest, and his religion a dull routine, abhorrent to him, but inevitable, because there was nothing else to do. His duties at Langar were unexacting. He prepared a weekly sermon, visited the sick when there were any sick to visit, and saw to the garden. Indolence made him heavy and sullen. His discontent had no outlet, and so fermented inside him, puffing him out, making him swollen, indigestive. His eyes were cloudy, his cheeks heavy, his mouth ponderous. The only real asset he had was a tolerable fortune inherited from his father. This gave him a certain power, a means of making himself felt, at least in the limited circle of his family. He was interested in botany, but only to the extent of collecting and classifying. His servants and parishioners found him kindly and generous, and liked him.

He married the daughter of a sugar-refiner. She was a different type, emotional, romantic,

vapid, spending herself where he accumulated, quick as he was slow, given to reverie, to dramatising and idealising their life together. She twittered and jingled through her days, reaching for the lover beneath the husband, the priest beneath the clergyman, the father beneath the parent. The word 'love' was often on her lips; her thoughts wove fabulous patterns; dreams tingled her flesh, and glinted in her eyes.

This was the place where Butler was born, and these the two that begot him. His nature partook of their two natures. Like his father he signed cheques with solemnity, classified and arranged information, botanised, only instead of about a countryside, in the British Museum Library; like his mother he vaporised his emotions into a confused mist of spitefulness and sentimentality, built his appetites into thin, shadowy ideals, so that a parasite like Pauli became radiant with beauty in his eyes, and the portentous Jones a rare spirit, a witty and fascinating companion.

The half-light of a rectory sitting-room, the plush and fantastic turns of its furniture, the replete aftermath of heavy meals, the oppression of family intimacy, all were calculated to twist and contort the spirit, and make it sprout luxuriantly, to engender a Canon Butler and a Mrs. Butler, and, out of them, a Samuel Butler.

They assembled for breakfast. Canon Butler was a little liverish, the print of the newspaper dancing a little as he looked it over. A cold bath had left him raw. His mouth craved for the tang of coffee. Mrs. Butler poured out with precision, serving her husband first,

rather more generously than the others, thus acknowledging the privileges to which, as head of the house, he was entitled. There was a crunching of toast, a reaching out for butter and marmalade, a coming and going of plates. The children spread their toast under their mother's eye. She noticed what was eaten, estimated, compared the consumption at this breakfast with others. The service was efficient, the equipment substantial and familiar. Everything was familiar. It had all happened again and again before, and would go on happening for ever. Mrs. Butler made a remark about the weather, head on one side, bird-like; Canon Butler picked up a letter, sliced it open with a knife, absorbed its contents slowly. The others watched. Having letters enhanced his importance in their eyes, extended his authority to outside the Rectory. He was written to, had business, was a man of affairs. Mrs. Butler would have liked to know what was in the letter; but he said nothing about it, brushed aside its existence by reading from the newspaper of such a death, such a birth, such a marriage, such preferment. These were events—deaths, births, marriages, preferment.

After breakfast, Canon Butler retired to his study. He had nothing much to do with himself, a sermon to work on, laborious commentary on a biblical tag; or, like Theobald, he "cut little bits out of the Bible, and gummed them with exquisite neatness by the side of other little bits; this he called making a Harmony of the Old and New Testaments. Alongside the extracts he copied in the very perfection of handwriting extracts from Mede (the only man, according to



Theobald, who really understood the Book of Revelations), Patrick and other old divines. He worked steadily at this for half an hour every morning. . . ."

The children were brought into his study for lessons. That was a serious matter. As they learnt now, so they would prosper hereafter. Learning was a tangible thing that could be calculated as exactly as a bank account. He had learnt things, and thereby became Rector of Langar. They must learn, and become rectors. Such was the life process. Canon Butler was strict and thorough at hearing his children's lessons. When they failed to make the progress he thought they should make he beat them, stood up, a swollen, wrathful figure, and Butler, whimpering, shrank from him. Like Ernest, Butler knew the Eton Greek and Latin grammars off by heart before he was twelve. He began Latin at four, and was taught to kneel in prayer before he could walk.

Thus the morning passed until dinner-time, when they assembled again to eat. Mrs. Butler had been bustling about the house all the morning, and was still slightly breathless, words running into each other when she spoke. Canon Butler was more cheerful than at breakfast, attempting an occasional pun or jocular remark. The morning rawness of his face had dulled to its normal glow. He unbent at the dinner-table as he satisfied a hearty appetite, whetted by three hours of exercising authority over his children, bullying and battering and teaching them.

After dinner he drowsed over what remained unread in his newspaper. Fragments of sentences, shadows of ideas, meandered indolently

through his mind. The children played and quarrelled together. Mrs. Butler lay down, but not to sleep. The inimitable letter to "my two dear boys" later to appear unaltered in *The Way of All Flesh*, was composed, touched up, brought to perfection. She was dying, and the family gathered reverently round to hear her last words; she was praying, and Christ revealed Himself to her in a heavenly vision; she was sleeping, and a lover, a glorified Canon Butler, bent over her and touched her lips with his.

Canon Butler shook himself and reluctantly prepared to go visiting. He slowly laced heavy boots, took up his stick, and then strode along country lanes, breath coming rather heavily, punctilious in raising his wide black hat when he met a parishioner, punctiliously bowing and smiling and cracking a joke. They were the sheep of his pasture, and he the shepherd. He bore good cheer to the hale, and consolation to the sick and dying, ladled out good cheer and consolation. Death expected something of him that he found it hard to give, since he could not, like his wife, unleash his emotions. They must be held in, restrained. He was dumb and made noises as the dumb do, painful and incoherent and empty.

"'I am afraid I'm going to Hell, Sir,' says the sick woman with a whine. 'Oh, Sir, save me, save me, don't let me go there. I couldn't stand it, Sir, I should die with fear; the very thought of it drives me into a cold sweat all over.'"

"'Mrs. Thompson,' says Theobald gravely, 'you must have faith in the precious blood of your Redeemer; it is He alone who can save you.'"

"'But are you sure, Sir,' says she, looking



wistfully at him, 'that He will forgive me—for I've not been a very good woman, indeed I haven't—and if God would only say "yes" outright with His mouth when I ask whether my sins are forgiven me——'

" 'But they are forgiven you, Mrs. Thompson,' says Theobald with some sternness. . . . 'You must please take my word for it that at the Day of Judgment your sins will all be washed white in the blood of the Lamb, Mrs. Thompson. Yea,' he exclaims, 'though they be as scarlet, yet shall they be as white as wool,' and he makes off as fast as he can from the atmosphere of the cottage to the pure air outside. Oh, how thankful he is when the interview is over."

Canon Butler tramped back to the Rectory. It was getting dark now. He met the men coming home from the fields. Forlorn and inarticulate, still punctiliously raising his wide black hat and mouthing good cheer, he greeted them all. The Rectory received him. In its light and warmth he thawed, drew round him the folds of his authority, asked what had been happening during his absence, where this person was, where that. Mrs. Butler gave him tea.

Worship rounded off the day. The servants were called up, and they and the family listened while Canon Butler read from the Old Testament. Butler, shrinking a little, yet fascinated, listened as his father rolled out words whose bitterness made them satisfying in a way that the poor, threadbare spiritual consolation he offered Mrs. Thompson could not satisfy. Canon Butler's nostrils sucked up the stench of sacrificial blood. The ferocious pranks of a tribal God enlivened the dead Rectory; and a flush came to his

heavy cheeks as, like Theobald, he read: "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath Day. . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, the man shall be surely put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp." There was a rich rumble in his voice, a glow in his eye and irradiating his face. A sort of glory descended upon the heavy armchairs, and the sofa, and the stolid faces of the servants, and the clock in its glass case, and the pictures symmetrically arranged, one of Elijah being fed by the ravens, with a thin greasy line traced in butter from the prophet's mouth to the ravens' beaks. Butler, a conscientious objector, a tremulous "No! No!" in his heart, sat still and afraid.

Years later, he painted the scene, with himself drawn apart from the others, sitting in the shadow of a curtain and behind his father's back. Thus he symbolised his revolt. So much he dared—to draw apart from the others and sit behind his father's back, a pale, solitary figure. He wrote on the picture, "Family Prayers": "I did this in 1864, and if I had gone on doing things out of my own head instead of making studies, I should have been all right." It is the equivalent, as far as his painting is concerned, of *The Way of All Flesh*. Being out of his own head it had to be about Langar.

After prayers, they dispersed and went to bed. Lips fell on cheeks and on other lips. Butler's lips, always pouting, met his mother's, rested a moment amongst the folds of dry flesh round his father's mouth. So much contact, then dispersal. His nights were full of horror. He parsed and

prayed under the shadow of his father's wrath, and was stoned for having gathered sticks on a Sabbath Day, and shrank from his mother's caresses, and groaned with the consciousness of sin, deep sin, and piped his "No! No!" his protest, his conscientious objection.

On Sundays they all proceeded to church, and sat together in the front pew. Canon Butler officiated in his white surplice, his voice echoing heavily as he prayed and blessed and read the lessons. The rest of the congregation consisted of "men in blue smock frocks reaching to their heels, and more than one old woman in a scarlet cloak: rows of stolid, dull plough-boys, ungainly in build, uncomely in face, lifeless, apathetic." They all stood and sang, accompanied by a clarinet, violoncello and trombone, their voices lusty and tuneless. Butler shrank into himself, opened his lips and made no sound, sat as far apart as he dared from his mother and brother and sisters, fell clumsily on to his hassock to pray, shuddered as his father climbed into the pulpit, as words broke painfully from his dumb face, and caught through the open church door a "momentary glimpse of a dreary, leaden sky and snow-clad tombstones."

There is hate in every reference Butler makes to his childhood. His family, it seemed to him, were banded together in a conspiracy to make him unhappy, to hurt and deform him, to deprive him of those things for which his soul longed. Hatred accumulated all through his childhood, and for the rest of his life he had to carry it about with him, a great load of hate weighing him down, and hate at its worst, because love gone rancid. The very flesh of his parents and

brother and sisters became abominable to him as his love for them gradually turned into hate, first unconscious and then conscious. He shuddered at their touch, and, at the same time, was bound to them, was one flesh with them.

This was what rankled with him most, his oneness with them. He might flee to the ends of the earth, desecrate their gods, cut away every living contact with them and their world, divorce himself from life altogether in order to divorce himself from them, and still, still, Langar held him, a prisoner. He carried Langar about with him. He unpacked his bags in a hotel room and it became at once a rectory; put on a new suit and it became clerical, graceless and sombre like one of his father's suits; opened his mouth and lo! a sermon, boredom, the drone of unfelt hopes and unbelieved beliefs. Looking back on his childhood, he saw himself being delivered into the hands of his enemies, irretrievably identified with all he most hated and despised, irretrievably cut off from all he most admired—self-confidence, good-breeding, ease of manner, charm, good looks. As his hatred of Langar intensified so his admiration for what he imagined Langar had deprived him of became fabulous and exaggerated. The two—his hatred of Langar and his admiration for its opposite—are symbolised in *The Way of All Flesh* in the characters of Theobald and Towneley.

Theobald is Canon Butler. He is done to the life, except that Butler transferred to him his own doubts and travail over ordination. "He never liked me," he wrote of his father, "nor I him: from my earliest recollections I can call

to mind no time when I did not fear him and dislike him. Over and over again I have relented towards him and said to myself that he was a good fellow after all; but I had hardly done so when he would go for me in some way or other which soured me again. I have no doubt I made myself very disagreeable; certainly I have done many very silly and very wrong things; I am not at all sure that the fault is more his than mine. But no matter whose it is, the fact remains that for years and years I have never passed a day without thinking of him many times over as the man who was sure to be against me, and who would see the bad side rather than the good of everything I said and did."

This is not ordinary hate. On the most generous estimate of the wrongs Butler suffered at the hands of his father—bullying in childhood, will-shaking in manhood, depreciation of his abilities and achievements—his hatred of him still cannot be accounted for. Even his own bitter interpretation of everything his father did, said and wrote fails to provide a reason for brooding on the wrongs he thought he had suffered at his hands "many times over" every day of his life. "There can be no peace or contentment for me until either he or I are where the wicked cease from troubling," he wrote, not as an adolescent, but as a grown man; wrote and then revised a year or so before his death.

They were like rivals, always on the look out for a chance to depreciate one another. "He talks of writing," Canon Butler wrote of Butler to his wife; "but it requires more than his powers to do this." "I know as well as possible what they will say," Butler wrote about his father's

botany, "they will say of me, 'He doubtless imbibed his love of science from the example of his father, who was an excellent botanist.' . . . My father knows the names of a good many plants, and if you give him a plant he does not know, he can worry out its name from some one or other of the many botanical works of reference. And he can cut the *ligulæ* to tie plants down to the blotting-paper; and he can make the gum; and he can strap the plant down with consummate neatness, and write its name under it, and say where it came from. All this he can do, and does exceedingly well, and he likes the job because it gives him something to do; but with this his botany begins and ends, and his love of science generally begins and ends with his botany. I never derived the smallest assistance from him for any of my books; and he has more than once told me that he has never read and never will read any book of mine except *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*."

This rivalry, and sense of being in his parents' power filled Butler with a passionate desire, which increased with age, persisting long after his father and mother were dead, to make them suffer as they had made him suffer, to punish them, not for bringing him into the world, but for bringing him into their world. It was one of his favourite theories that birth is to unborn children what death is to men. He imagined unborn children pestering married couples until one or other would consent to let them be born, and his grievance was that such a married couple as Canon Butler and Mrs. Butler should have heeded his importunities, so that he came into the world compounded of their gracelessness and stupidity.



How was he to revenge himself? It was difficult, because of his own cowardice and his father's money. Cowardice made him shrink from any open breach, and money was a particularly formidable weapon in his eyes. Even as a child he learnt to respect money, and respected and venerated it all his life. He had the same sort of attitude towards it as Delilah towards Samson's hair. Samson, his locks shorn, was a pitiable, ribald figure, the sport of his enemies; in the same way Canon Butler, with no bank account to draw cheques on, lost all his majesty and authority. Why fear him, then? Why bother about him, then? Without money he became, instead of a force before which Butler cowered, an obscure clergyman of no importance to anyone. With money he was irresistible, able to bind Butler to him, order his life and quite overshadow it.

Money was Canon Butler's most effective instrument for bringing his son to heel. It continued to be effective long after Butler had grown beyond the reach of his parental authority. Thus Butler came to think of money as the only defence the weak had against the overbearing, more as an attribute like intelligence or beauty, whose lack was not merely unfortunate but shameful, even sinful. Without money he was ashamed, like a modest spinster without clothes. He described his unfortunate speculations with the same passionate repentance as St. Augustine his early dissipation. Almost the only man he really felt he had wronged was a certain Moorhouse, who acted as his mortgagee in New Zealand, and from whom he called in his money in 1870; and after Ernest has been arrested, and Towneley and Overton are doing what they can

in his interest, he makes Overton tell Towneley that Ernest will come into his aunt's money in a few years' time so as to ensure Towneley's putting out his maximum effort to help Ernest. "Towneley was doing all he could before this," he writes in the character of Overton, "but I knew that the knowledge I had imparted to him would make him feel as though Ernest was more one of his own class, and had, therefore, a greater claim upon his good offices."

Money prevented Butler from having his own back on his parents. He could not trample on his father, even had to prune his books of the passages that would most offend him, for fear of being disinherited. His revenge had to be abstract because of money. He had to enjoy it alone, spin it out secretly, sitting by himself. That at least gave him a free hand. It meant he could make his father suffer any torment he chose. His revenge was *The Way of All Flesh*; and the particular torment he chose to inflict on his father was to humiliate him just by having more money than he had ever had. This was the best, the most complete, revenge he could think of—to be richer, far richer, than his father, and spring the fact unexpectedly on him when he thought he was poverty-stricken.

So, after Ernest has been in prison, and has cut himself off from his parents, he gets a letter from Theobald telling him that Christina is dying, and asking him to come and see her. Theobald encloses a postal order for his fare, and gives him permission to spend up to eight or nine pounds on clothes, since he does not know that Ernest has inherited his Aunt Alethea's money. Butler turned Ernest out so well that



"Towneley himself could not have been appointed more becomingly"—portmanteau and railway-wrapper of the very best, grey ulster, blue-and-white necktie. He gloried in Theobald's discomfiture—"Was it for this that he had been generous enough to provide Ernest with decent clothes in which to come and visit his mother's death-bed? Could any advantage be meaner than the one Ernest had taken? Well, he would not get a penny beyond the eight or nine pounds he had promised. It was fortunate he had given a limit. Why, even he, Theobald, had never been able to afford such a portmanteau. He was still using the old one his father had turned over to him when he went up to Cambridge. Besides, he had said clothes, not a portmanteau.

"Ernest saw what was passing through his father's mind, and felt that he ought to have prepared him for what he now saw. . . . He put out his hand and said laughingly, 'Oh, it's all paid for—I am afraid you do not know that Mr. Overton has handed over to me Aunt Alethea's money.'"

This was Butler's revenge, to confront Theobald with an Ernest in a grey ulster and blue-and-white necktie, who could put out his hand and say laughingly that it was all paid for, who was rich enough, handsome enough, assured enough, to be able, later on, to say "that to Theobald which made him turn almost to an ashen colour," who had Theobald at his mercy.

Even then his revenge was not complete. Even then he could not carry it right through. Secure, doors and windows closed, no prying eyes, no necessity to quarrel or shout, assert

himself, secretly tracing out his revenge on paper, then hiding it away—even then he faltered, was afraid, made Ernest kneel down in his grey ulster and blue-and-white necktie by his mother's bed and groan: "Mother, forgive me—the fault was mine, I ought not to have been so hard; I was wrong, very wrong." Got up regardless, but still the fault was his.

Butler's grudge started with his father. Later on he extended it to include dons and bishops and book-reviewers,—almost everyone. But it started with his father, with the ring of his father's heavy hand on his bare flesh, and the roar of his father's voice in his frightened ears, and the ponderous emptiness of his father's ideas, and the gracelessness of his father's way of life. He built a world round his father, hated the world he had built, then, horrified, realised that he lived in it, and must go on living in it to the end of his life.

In *The Way of All Flesh* Butler dramatised his childhood, presenting himself as a poor little David Copperfield, bullied and battered and harassed, the helpless victim of adult cruelty. Both Butler and Dickens, being essentially dissatisfied with themselves, and with their lives, found satisfaction in the thought that they had been badly mauled about as children; had, it is true, survived, but only just. Looking back from their adult discontent, the intervening time hazy with sentimentality and frustrated indeterminate hopes and visions, they saw the little Dickens and the little Butler, so weak and pale and puny, so pitiable and helpless, and shook their heads, and murmured: "How we suffered!" and marvelled that, after such harsh treatment, they should be

the men they were. Dickens's self-pity took a more melodramatic form than Butler's. His little boys starved, and went to the workhouse, and learnt to steal, whereas Butler's little boy always had plenty to eat, was scrupulously correct in money matters if he was sometimes a bit short of cash, and always terrified by the thought that he might be disinherited. On the other hand, if Dickens's little boys began lower, they climbed higher, and got more fun in the end. Except for comic relief, Butler kept to a social average, whereas Dickens fluctuated widely, jumping from the slums to Park Lane, from a workhouse to lords and ladies. They both, however, employed essentially the same method, dramatising the fears and sense of inferiority that assailed them when they were men in the knocks they sustained in childhood, using weakness then to explain, even glorify, weakness hereafter, in the same way that a man with a wooden leg loves to tell people about his accident.

Butler, alone in his room in Clifford's Inn, and writing *The Way of All Flesh*, watched Ernest go off to school, seated between Theobald and Christina, "a mere bag of bones, with upper arms about as thick as the wrist of other boys of his age, his little chest pigeon-breasted, appearing to have no stamina whatever." His pity for this wretched little creature was lachrymose; "he had now got about as much as he could stand, and felt as though it must go hard with him if his burdens of whatever kind were to be increased." As the carriage takes him away from home and towards school he weeps, but not, as Butler carefully explained,

because he is troubled at the thought of being separated from his father and mother, but because Langar, that he is leaving, is a known evil, and Roughborough, where he is going, an unknown one. Also, he has heard that there is bullying at Roughborough.

Butler watched Ernest and Theobald and Christina being received by Dr. Skinner, who was modelled on Dr. Kennedy, his own headmaster at Shrewsbury; and it was little Oliver and Mr. Bumble, little David and the Murdstones. Shut in by Mr. Skinner's books, his retreat cut off by three adult enemies, Ernest falls back on weeping, "doubtless through an intense but inarticulate sense of boredom greater than he could bear." Butler watched, and his heart went out in pity. This was what the world was like, new life feasted on by old life, the aged like vampires sucking youth dry, Theobald sucking Ernest dry, his father sucking him dry. Hate leapt up, a flame, inside him. He rolled his hate like a snowball over all he remembered of his life, and it grew and grew.

The other boys do not like Ernest much, at best just tolerate him. How should they like him, Butler thought to himself, watching, when his body was so miserable, when he was hopeless at games, when his father had made him ungainly and self-conscious? To try to placate the other boys Ernest drinks surreptitious beer, and, against all his instincts, neglects his lessons. This does not help him much. The beer makes him sick, being low in the class humiliates him; and he has nothing in return except the faint esteem of what Butler called the Nice People.

He worshipped these Nice People, who were so different from himself. What he might with infinite labour inadequately learn, they knew, and knew so well that the knowledge was unconscious. He watched them at their games, and noted the ease with which they neglected their studies. Games were a penance to him, and so was neglecting his studies, because the Theobald in him made him tremble to know the marks he had scored. He watched particularly their bodies, so graceful, so shameless. Watching their bodies, he loved them. A woman's body was hateful, because Christina's, because a means of creating another body, several, a family, a rectory; but a Nice Person's body was exquisite, unfecund, sufficient unto itself.

The general opinion about Ernest at Roughborough is that he is a "young muff." He dislikes being hurt, he finds the atmosphere "so gusty that he was glad to shrink out of sight and out of mind whenever he could." Although he is bad at his work the other boys easily sense that at heart he is a swat, that his indifference to his position in class is hollow, like the inviting smile of a virtuous woman trying to be licentious. At Shrewsbury Butler also was regarded as a muff by the Nice People. Instead of resenting their contempt, and convincing himself that muffs inherited the earth, he prostrated himself in front of them. As a muff he was amongst the damned; and his only chance of salvation lay in his recognition that this was so, and in his earnest propagation of the doctrine of non-muffery. His faith in non-muffery lasted all his life, standing even the strain of Pauli. Occasionally doubts came to him, as they might to a devout clergyman. In

1882 he made this note about a remark of Moorhouse's to the effect that very handsome, well-dressed men were seldom good men: "I liked Moorhouse very much and listened deferentially to all he said. I did not like to hear him say this, for I knew I liked men to be handsome and well dressed. I have thought about it a good deal during the more than twenty years that have passed since Moorhouse's words were spoken, and even now I do not know what to say. Sometimes they are, and sometimes they are not." This was the farthest his doubts about non-muffery ever went.

Like Ernest, Butler "did not like boys whom he thought like himself. His heroes were strong and vigorous, and the less they inclined to him the more he worshipped them." With all the pathetic credulity that sensitive, vulnerable natures are capable of, he fastened on to the illusion that these boys, since they were different from him, were better, nobler, a higher type of creature altogether. In his eyes, their health and their strength glowed with an inward beauty and significance. They did not get carried, as he did, into the darkness of self-reproach, self-humiliation, self-hate; they were not afraid, as he was, of being hurt, not afraid even of their fathers; their homes, unlike his, were full of light and gaiety. "'Pontifex,' Dr. Skinner said . . . 'do you never laugh? Do you always look so portentously grave?'" . . . Ernest turned crimson and escaped." "Is it wonderful," Butler asks, "that the boy, though always trying to keep up appearances as though he was cheerful and contented—and at times actually being so—wore often an anxious and jaded look when he



thought no one was looking, which told of an almost incessant conflict within? ”

This “incessant conflict within ” was deep and enduring. It never went. His life was never harmonious. All he was able to do was to impose an outside orderliness, but inside the conflict continued to the end—the conflict in his nature between Theobald and Christina, between mind and flesh, between extravagant self-depreciation and extravagant egotism, between a sense of sin and a conviction that there was no sin. Sin more than anything oppressed him. He struggled against it, but it remained a shadow on his face. The men he envied were those with no burden of sin upon them; the life he wanted to live was one in which the question of sin did not arise. Finding that he could not shake off sin, he tried emasculating, formularising it, and fleeing from it as he had flown from Langar. It was no good. Sin was part of his paternal heritage—gilt-edged securities and sin; and if he wanted gilt-edged securities (and he did want them, so much) he had to have the sin as well.

Sin meant the flesh. Like Ernest, when “his inner self urged him in directions where he met obstacles beyond his strength to combat, he took—though with passionate compunctions of conscience—the nearest course to the one from which he was debarred which circumstances would allow.” Sometimes, when he was at home and had got up early to play Handel, one of the Rectory maids would be tidying the room. He looked at her sidelong as he played, fingers clutching the notes in a passionate, terrified way. She smiled. A Nice Person would have known how to respond to such a smile, but he did not



know, burrowed deeper into his music, taking great gulps of it to quench his body's thirst. His appetites, like his thoughts, turned inwards to consume themselves—"the nearest course to the one from which he was debarred which circumstances would allow"!

His father and mother tried to probe sometimes, protruded questions, like fingers, into his soul's darkness. His mother took him to the sofa. He sank into cushions, dreading the contest between them, already on the point of surrender. What did she know? What would she ask him? Her physical nearness horrified him—the touch of her hand, the warmth of her breath. She stroked his hair; "My dearest boy!" What would she ask him? What did she know? "My dearest boy!" He could not resist. It was too much for him. He buried his head in her bosom and wept. Sometimes the attack was a joint one. Ernest faints, and falls seriously ill, when Theobald and Christina reach, in interrogating him, "subjects more delicate than any they had yet touched on."

Even when Ernest has become a præpostor "the watchful eye and protecting hand were still ever over him to guard his comings in and his goings out, and to spy out all his ways." The bondage continues, is not relaxed for adolescence, even for manhood. Theobald notices the "anxious, jaded look Ernest wore when none were looking, and knew how to interpret it." He, however, deliberately shuts his eyes. "It was not much that was wanted. To make no mysteries where Nature has made none, to bring his conscience under reasonable control, to give Ernest his head a little more, to

## BUTLER AND HIS FAMILY

ask fewer questions, and to give him pocket money with a desire that it should be spent upon *menus plaisirs*. . . ."

Butler blamed his father for his troubled adolescence, as for all else. It, too, was part of his grudge. If only no mystery had been made, if only fewer questions had been asked, his conscience brought under greater control, he might have been spared the terrified sense of sin and inadequacy that hung over him for so many years. His parents were responsible, just as they were responsible for his ungainly body and shrinking nature. They had given him life as grudgingly as they gave him money. All that was dead and distorted in him he laid at their door: then all that was dead and distorted in the world, until they symbolised death and distortion.

Mrs. Garnett, in her book, *Samuel Butler and His Family Relations*, attempts to correct Butler's account of his childhood. She quotes from letters and diaries to show that, far from being the dreary, quarrelsome place which Butler describes, Langar Rectory was full of fun. Everyone, she says, loved the Canon; the original of Christina was a dear, motherly creature; Butler's sister Harriet was certainly a "masterful personality" and "fiercely orthodox," but essentially amiable, while May was a pattern of Christian saintliness, and talented and witty besides. Butler's vision, Mrs. Garnett suggests, was distorted because of the hurts, real and fancied, he had received at his father's hands. He did not in any case, she thinks, mean the characters in *The Way of All Flesh* to be taken

literally, but simply used them to portray and satirise the general characteristics of a Victorian home, and would have been horrified to think that people might identify Theobald with Canon Butler and Christina with Mrs. Butler.

Actually, all Butler's fictitious characters are based on real people, and most of them are variations of himself, his father and mother and brother and sisters, and Pauli. His mind was intensely, almost pathologically literal. Metaphor, for instance, was altogether incomprehensible to him. "Without my cloak" meant that Shakespeare went out without an overcoat, nothing else. Of all writers, he was the least symbolical; and it is beyond question that *The Way of All Flesh* represents his exact opinion of the sort of people his parents were, of the sort of life they lived and of the effect of them and their manner of life on him.

Mrs. Garnett suggests that Butler hated Langar because he felt it to be evil. He was more tolerant than most people where evil (except financial delinquency) was concerned. What he hated in Langar was its dullness, its mediocrity; more than anything, his entanglement in its dullness and mediocrity. All Mrs. Garnett's evidence goes to show how, from his point of view, unutterably dull and mediocre and graceless it was. Canon Butler's puns and verses, his tender, playful rhymes to his wife when she was ill, that Mrs. Garnett quotes as proving his charm and humanity, must have sickened Butler even more than the lashes he received for failing at his lessons. They were so boring, so ponderous; and they made him afraid, and with reason, that he was often boring and ponderous himself.

After giving an account of Harriet's self-

willedness, Mrs. Garnett says: "Think what a picture Sam might have drawn if to ridicule his sister had been his object!" Here, she means, is rare material for satire, and Butler falls back on such trivialities as his sister's fondness for words like "bright" and "little" and "sweet." In Butler's eyes, however, being fond of words like "bright" and "sweet" and "little" was infinitely more deplorable than being self-willed. If Harriet had just been self-willed he would not have minded. The fact that he did not ridicule her self-willedness shows, not a desire to spare her or to make her a fictitious character, but that he thought self-willedness the smallest of her vices, perhaps a positive virtue. What he could not forgive her was being dull and inane. She was not a Nice Person, and, along with the others, had prevented him from being a Nice Person. If Ernest had happened to meet Towneley in the street when he was with his sister Charlotte (a character compounded of Butler's sisters May and Harriet), he would have blushed. Harriet's clothes were all wrong, her face was insipid, her ideas were commonplace, contemptible. At the same time, she was pretentious, assertive, strong in a way, even ventured to have literary aspirations and to deprecate his.

On the whole, Mrs. Garnett's description of the Langar household is more depressing than Butler's. The "fun and sparkle" of May's verses (Mr. Kingsmill, who has an unerring eye in such matters, has picked out one of the best:

"Never a drop of whiskey  
To keep the frost away,  
Nor e'en a single biskey  
To cheer the bitter day"),

the cloying dullness of her journal, Canon Butler's flat-footed jocularity and gallantry—it is easy to imagine it all grinding into Butler's soul, particularly when he was so conscious of his identification with it, when he felt his father's nature like a doom in himself, when May's verses broke through his own, and tramping to and from the British Museum, or to and from Madame's room in Handel Street, was tramping to and from Mrs. Thompson with spiritual consolation.

“What should an orthodox father, what should deeply filial and religious sisters, do with a man and brother who had written such books as *Erewhon* and *The Fair Haven*?” Mrs. Garnett asks. “He had attacked their Holy of Holies; attacked it, moreover, maliciously, treacherously, under a pretence of regard. How could he be welcomed without constraint in the old home, how could he be received on the old footing, when he had shown himself in his printed works the unscrupulous foe of everything they lived for? It is in the very nature of things that constraint and silence should have fallen on all the family when he came down. On no other hypothesis can I explain why people who were found by everyone else who came in contact with them to be particularly kind, pleasant, affectionate and gay, impressed this one observer as being dull and gloomy hypocrites.”

Everyone else found Butler's father and mother and brother and sisters kind and gay, when he found them cruel and boring, not because they were constrained with him, but because he saw them with different eyes. He was one of those who smell death in life and hate in love. Decay

was always in his nostrils, and beauty's scaffolding, dry bones, broke through its flesh. Faces were masks, and passion a harlequinade. He saw the stage at noonday, painted scenery by the light of the sun, and actors and actresses gesticulating and ranting in an empty auditorium. He sensed the fraudulence of his parents' kindness and affection and gaiety which everyone else accepted as valid. It tortured him because he was aware of its falsity. He preferred the cruelty into which, in private, the Langar household easily lapsed, to its kindness; the sullen silence that Canon Butler's inarticulate discontent often imposed, to its gaiety. It is Christina at her most affectionate whom Ernest finds most insupportable; the letter to "my two dear boys" made Butler grind his teeth with impotent fury when he might have forgiven his mother her vanity and occasional spitefulness.

Theobald and Christina and Joey and Charlotte, as presented by Mrs. Garnett, explain *The Way of All Flesh*. They are its substance and its inspiration; they account for Butler, his life and work. Just as Dickens was not long in the blacking warehouse, and while there treated not so badly by companions whom afterwards he mercilessly satirised, so Butler's childhood may have been less intolerable than *The Way of All Flesh* suggests, and his parents and brother and sisters no duller and more venomous than the average at that time. Even so, in both their cases, the account they give of their childhood is valid as far as they are concerned, so that to understand the part it played in their development it must be taken at their valuation and not at a third party's. They saw themselves as

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having been wronged, ill-treated, stunted; and every time they were reminded of their disadvantages they looked back and wept over the poor little creature they saw struggling to make some sort of a life in adverse circumstances, and shook their fists frenziedly in the faces of those whom they held responsible for their unhappy plight.



## II

### BUTLER STOPS SAYING HIS PRAYERS

"For the present I renounce Christianity altogether. You say people must have something to believe in. I can only say that I have not found my digestion impeded since I have left off believing in what does not appear to be supported by sufficient evidence." (Letter to Marriott, 1862.)

BUTLER's father took him to Cambridge. They walked about the town together, seeing the sights. Canon Butler expanded a little. His university days had been happy. He had worked hard, got a good degree and then a fellowship. Butler liked Cambridge, too, and settled happily and thankfully into its mood. That sort of life always appealed to him. It was masculine, very private, very remote from the things he feared, from life; very ingenious and droll and protected. He might easily have been a don. In fact really he was a don; only in a one-man university. All his life he went on making donnish jokes, wore donnish clothes that sagged in a donnish way, cultivated donnish mannerisms, such as looking over the top of his spectacles, and, when he returned from New Zealand, settled in Clifford's Inn, the nearest thing he could find to university rooms in London.

He and his father dined together in Canon Butler's old college. Canon Butler unbent. You may have thought, he seemed to say, that my range did not extend beyond Langar; but see

me here, how easy I am, how well I play this part, too. He sipped port, made elephantine jokes, reminisced. Butler, looking on, marvelled. There must, he felt, be a catch in it somewhere if Canon Butler could do it so adequately; and he felt there and then irreverent about all Fellows of colleges, seeing that his father was one.

They strolled to John's, Butler's college, by the Backs. Canon Butler was mellow. Port and the drone of a familiar idiom, the sense that a way of life, once very familiar to him, still went on, had mellowed him. He almost felt inclined to take Butler's arm. After all, it was something to have a son, grown up and treading the same path he had trodden, repeating his performance, undergraduate to Fellow, Fellow to rector, then more Butlers, more undergraduates and Fellows and rectors.

Butler sensed the impulse to take his arm. As when his mother cornered him on the sofa, so now he groaned inwardly, shrank into himself, pleaded for mercy. Voice husky a little, like when he prayed, Canon Butler gave him advice—to work hard, to avoid the contamination of bad companions, to score marks, never to do anything that he would not care to tell his mother. Butler shuddered, not so much because he resented the advice as because he knew that his very nature would force him to follow it. If only he could not work! If only he could win the esteem of bad companions, and do things that he would not care to tell his mother! All his instincts were the other way. What worried him was his inability to avoid following his father's advice. His father's voice mocked him because he heard in it the drone of his own.

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They walked on to John's, to the very gate, and there parted. Butler heard the College gates close behind his father. He was on one side, and Canon Butler on the other. Latch-key in his pocket, another door to shut and lock, many doors—he was free at last. Never, never free. How should he be free when he carried his bondage in his soul? Afraid, he gathered books and shelves and heavy curtains round him like clothes; then, seated in an armchair, he remembered delightedly that there was no Canon Butler to come along and turn him out of it as of right.

At Cambridge Butler soon became “one of the nearer hangers-on of the best set of his year.” For the first time in his life he was “consciously and continuously happy.” The Nice People allowed him to include himself as one of their number. He was able to work hard without letting them know about it; to drink with them, but without having to drink much; to pick up their ways sufficiently well to pass muster, but without having to give up his own manner of life. He even coxed eight Nice People up and down the Cam, shouting out orders in a high, insistent voice, one of themselves. In the boat-house he watched self-confident thighs, the sting of cold water on broad chests, the soft, rippling surface of athletic backs, revelling in all that was the opposite of Langar and himself.

It is at Cambridge that Ernest meets Towneley, Niceness Incarnate, the principle of life contrasted with Langar, the principle of death; light and it darkness, progress and it stagnation; his face glowing with grace and beauty, and his limbs

moving easily and self-confidently. Towneley first crops up when Christina is trying to persuade Ernest to bring a few of his friends home for the holidays with a view to getting Charlotte a husband; "you know, my dear, a brother can do much for his sister if he lays himself out to do it. A mother can do very little—indeed, it is hardly a mother's place to seek out young men; it is a brother's place to find a suitable partner for his sister." Thus, Ernest broods, do the wicked lay their snares. Like a spider, Christina spins a web to enmesh Towneley. It must not be. Ernest may be himself compounded of darkness, but his eyes have seen the light. They have been at him before, trying to tear the secrets out of his heart. He imagines a dark conspiracy. Christina wants to mate truth with falsehood, Charlotte with Towneley, and Theobald to discredit his son in the eyes of Nice People; "Now I know Ernest has told this boy what a disagreeable person I am, and I will just show him that I am not disagreeable at all, but a good old fellow, a jolly old boy—in fact a regular old brick." Then Christina, when the guest has departed without falling in love with Charlotte, disparages him, sapping Ernest's faith in his own judgment, making him wonder if, after all, his admiration has not been excessive. This was always their way—to suck him into themselves, to contaminate with their own nature whatever he found which was not of it. They must breathe on Towneley, making him dull and unlovely, as they were.

When Christina mentions Towneley as a possible guest and son-in-law, Ernest flushes. He flushes whenever he sees Towneley or speaks

of him. A nod from him makes him incoherent with confusion. How could Towneley come to Langar?—when he “belonged to one of the most exclusive sets in Cambridge, and was, perhaps, the most popular man amongst the whole number of undergraduates. He was big and very handsome—as it seemed to Ernest the handsomest man whom he had ever seen or ever could see, for it was impossible to imagine a more agreeable and lively countenance. He was good at cricket and boating, very good-natured, singularly free from conceit, not clever but very sensible, and lastly, his father and mother had been drowned when he was only two years old, and had left him as their only child and heir to one of the finest estates in the south of England.”

In Butler's eyes such a man and such a life represented the best Nature could do, the climax of all the travail of creation, and the justification of all that had happened in the past. Angels were absurd, and the Ancient of Days obvious falsehood; the universe had come to pass, and he with it, in order that Towneley might be—big, handsome, good at cricket and rowing, sensible rather than clever, orphaned, heir to one of the finest estates in the south of England. How precise it is! How concrete! Coxing his boat up and down the Cam, peering in through the windows of tailors' shops, in and out of lecture-rooms, hanging about playing-fields on wintry afternoons, attaching himself to the “best set of his year,” he fashioned his God, not in his own image, but in the image of what was most unlike himself, and, having fashioned it, devoutly worshipped.

By a “strange accident,” Ernest coxes a boat

with Towneley in the crew. This "frightened him out of his wits," until he discovers that Towneley is "no less remarkable for his entire want of anything like 'side,' and for his power of setting those whom he came across at their ease, than he was for outward accomplishments." Henceforth Towneley never passes Ernest in the street without a condescending nod, and, sometimes, a few good-natured words.

What Butler admired in men like Towneley comes out most clearly in connection with Ernest's unfortunate encounter with Miss Snow, a prostitute whom he visits with a view to converting her, having first made up his mind, if the lusts of the flesh became unbearable, to fly from her presence. She lives in a room above his. He goes upstairs, "with a Bible under his arm and a consuming fire in his heart." Just when he has settled down to talk to Miss Snow, "a hurried step came bounding up the stairs, as though of one over whom the force of gravity had little power, and a man burst into the room." It is Towneley. "I've come before my time," he says with, Ernest thinks, superb self-possession; then, when he catches sight of Miss Snow's companion, his face drops: "What, *you* here, Pontifex! Well, upon my word!" There are hurried explanations. Ernest, "blushing scarlet," slinks off, "Bible and all, deeply humiliated as he contrasts himself and Towneley. Before he reached the bottom of the staircase leading to his own room he heard Towneley's hearty laugh through Miss Snow's door, and cursed the hour that he was born."

Inspired by Towneley's noble example, Ernest contemptuously throws away his Bible, and tries

a little stepping out like one over whom the force of gravity has little power on his own account. Unfortunately he makes a mistake about Miss Maitland, so that there is no hearty laughter for him, but a police-court appearance and six months' imprisonment for attempting to molest a respectable woman; "two policemen wereseen coming out of Mrs. Jupp's; between them shambled rather than walked our unhappy friend Ernest, with staring eyes, ghastly pale, and with despair branded upon every line of his face." Towneley can sin and be all the better for it; but with Ernest it ends in dejection and trouble. Nice People could sin, but not Butler; "what, *you* here, Pontifex! upon my word!" Their appetites became them, and his were secret, agonising. Why? he asked himself: why? And resentment burnt in him—resentment against his father for infecting him with his own ungainly spirit, against his mother for shaping him in such a way in her womb, against the whole way of life and attitude of mind in which he was nurtured, and which prevented him from sinning gracefully, as Towneley did.

His very resentment cut him off from Towneley and Towneley's world. It was a consequence of an inward, secret sense of impotence and deformity, like Thersites, who, to quote from his own translation of the *Iliad*, "still went on wagging his unbridled tongue—a man of many words, and those unseemly; a monger of sedition, a railer against all who were in authority, who cared not what he said, so that he might set the Achæans in a laugh. He was the ugliest man of all those that came before Troy—bandy-legged, lame of one foot, with his two shoulders rounded



and hunched over his chest. His head ran up to a point, but there was little hair on the top of it. Achilles and Ulysses hated him worst of all, for it was with them that he was most wont to wrangle; now, however, with a shrill, squeaky voice, he began heaping his abuse on Agamemnon."

Of Thersites's rôle Butler had a particular horror, because he knew it was his, and that he was fated to rail against all who were in authority, not to care what he said so long as he might raise a laugh, and to be regarded as ugly and graceless. Towneley was Ulysses and he Thersites, whom Ulysses "beat with his staff about the back and shoulders till he dropped and fell a-weeping." Therefore, he hated himself and loved Towneley. At the same time, he had to fulfil his nature. Even though he dropped and fell a-weeping, there was no escape for him from his own nature. When Ernest has been discharged from prison, he shuns Towneley, not because he worships him any less than formerly, but because he feels that any relationship between so exquisite a creature and himself must necessarily be troubled. "Towneley . . . knew that Ernest would have money soon, but Ernest did not, of course, know that he knew it. Towneley was rich himself, and was married now; Ernest would be rich soon, had bona fide intended to be married already, and would doubtless marry a lawful wife later on. Such a man was worth taking pains with; and when Towneley one day met Ernest in the street, and Ernest tried to avoid him, Towneley would not have it, but with his quick good-nature read his thoughts, caught him, morally, by the scruff of the neck, and turned

him laughingly inside out, telling him he would have no such nonsense. Towneley was just as much Ernest's idol now as he had ever been, and Ernest, who was very easily touched, felt more gratefully and warmly than ever towards him; but there was an unconscious something which was stronger than Towneley, and made my hero determined to break with him more determinedly perhaps than with any other living person; he thanked him in a low, hurried voice and pressed his hand, while tears came into his eyes in spite of all his efforts to repress them. 'If we meet again,' he said, 'do not look at me; but if hereafter you hear of me writing things you do not like, think of me as charitably as you can,' and so they parted."

Overton, also a personification of Butler, but at a later stage than Ernest, protests that Towneley is a good fellow, and that Ernest ought not to cut him. "Towneley," Ernest answers, "is not only a good fellow, but he is without exception the very best man I ever saw in my life except yourself. . . . Towneley is my notion of everything I should most like to be—but there is no real solidarity between us. I should be in perpetual fear of losing his good opinion if I said things he did not like, and I mean to say a great many things . . . which Towneley will not like."

Butler was constantly aware that in writing at all he was giving himself away in ways that were not apparent to him. He gives himself away here all right. Towneley is rich and married; Ernest is going to be rich and married; therefore he was worth taking pains with. The implication is that if he had not had financial

and matrimonial prospects, he would not have been worth taking pains with. It is as though Butler were justifying to himself his not being a Nice Person, trying to prove that deliberate choice rather than necessity kept him in the outer darkness of oddity instead of in the glory of Niceness.

If having an income and belonging to the upper classes did not make him a Towneley, it was first of all because his father and mother maliciously insisted on having other children, and refused to die when he was two years old and leave him heir to one of the best estates in the south of England; secondly, because he had given up Towneley, as he had given up his parents, for Truth's sake. The pursuit of Truth had demanded all his energies, all his allegiance, had made it necessary for him to relinquish even the charm of manner and grace of body which an inheritance such as his normally carried with it.

Then, too, there was the necessity to idealise. His love for Towneley would become contaminated, spoilt, if put to any test. He fled even from Towneley—"I should be in perpetual fear of losing his good opinion." He must not touch. There was a loophole, though—"except yourself." In this case yourself was myself. The adult Butler surveyed the adolescent Butler; or rather, the elderly adolescent Butler surveyed the youthful adolescent Butler, patted him on the head, murmuring: "Yes, my dear boy, you made mistakes, but what a dear, dear boy you were! And if you'd cared to, there's no knowing how far you might have gone. Why, you might have been a Towneley. And what is there finer than a Towneley?—except myself, except myself."

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If Butler felt constrained to hold his fire where Towneley was concerned, to press his hand, and turn away, and ask him to be merciful in judging the things he wrote, there was no such necessity where the others set in authority over him were concerned. Then he could lash out at without restraint—parents, lords temporal and spiritual, dons, writers and painters with established reputations, scientists, whosoever's utterances were taken to be authoritative. Lash at them with what? In her Autobiography Mrs. Besant describes how one evening she found herself in her husband's church. The church was deserted. She climbed into the pulpit, looked round at the empty pews, and began to orate. As she did so, a sense of power swept over her, a consciousness of her destiny. In the same way Butler began to write at Cambridge, to see that words were like darts with poisoned tips that he could plunge into the breasts of his enemies. With words he could lay Langar waste until not one stone was left standing on another, and bring his father's church, his father's God, his father's hopes and beliefs and standards of behaviour tumbling down one after the other. With words he was formidable.

Butler's first published work appeared in a magazine called the *Eagle* written and edited by members of John's. This was an essay "On English Composition and Other Matters," which shows how early his own style and essential attitude to life became formed, his curious literalness, his distrust of rules, the directness of his thought, and occasional breakdown into naïveté and sentimentality. What he says in this essay—that there are no rules for anything, that

the "greatest masters in language, whether prose or verse, in painting, music, architecture . . . have been men whose intuitive perception led them to right practice,"—is what he kept on saying in one form or another all the rest of his life. Another essay of his published in the *Eagle*, "Our Town," is an early version of *Alps and Sanctuaries*. It finishes up: ". . . next day came safely home to dear old Johns, cash in hand 7d."

Ernest, too, as an undergraduate publishes an essay in a Cambridge magazine in his third year at the University. It is on Greek drama, and even more mature than "On English Composition and Other Matters," ending with: "I am free to confess that with the exception perhaps of some of the Psalms of David, I know of no writings which seem so little to deserve their reputation. I do not know that I should particularly mind my sister reading them, but I will take good care never to read them myself." The essay, "perhaps on account of the bit about the Psalms," created quite a sensation, and "was on the whole well received." Before they were published, Butler believed that nearly all his books would shock people, and so create a sensation. He says this again and again in his letters to Miss Savage. When they neither shocked nor created a sensation, he was bitterly disappointed.

Butler got up at a quarter past five. His sitting-room was dark, the ashes of the previous day's fire still in the grate. He dressed hurriedly, not taking a bath, icy water stinging his face. His clothes lay where he had slipped out of them when he went to bed, crumpled pants still in the trousers, shirt and vest together. He dressed

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hurriedly and made tea, sipping it hot, taking noisy gulps of it to warm himself. Printed words stung his mind as cold water his face. He remembered examinations that lay ahead of him, questions, and the blankness and agony of not being able to answer them, his father's scorn of failure, his minute interrogations, "How did you answer that? What references did you give here?"—thick, short finger moving relentlessly from one question to another.

The Nice People, he remembered, were all still abed, clothes folded ready to put on, or, if not folded, somehow fresher, less crumpled than his. Examinations had no terror for them. They did not get up at a quarter past five to read by the ashes of yesterday's fire, and to swallow gulps of scalding tea. They rose joyously in the morning, freshly, like birds in the springtime, without fears for the future or shame for the past, only joy in the present. Why was he not as they? Why dark and secretive? Why finding it necessary to sit over books even before dawn broke? When it did break it mocked him. He so conscious when it so unconscious, so stale when it so fresh, so cut off from life when it was a glow, a radiance, emanating from the very core or heart of creation, like the blush that emanated from his heart when some resplendent creature, Leander tie, tattered gown carelessly carried, clothes elegantly worn, passed him in King's Parade, and nodded to him.

From such thoughts he turned back to his book. It was an escape, something he could understand, a game whose rules he could master, and play—ideas, formulated there in black and white, arranged in such a way, and easily rearranged in another. He turned back eagerly



to his book, seeming to hear a ponderous voice questioning, to see a swollen face awaiting his answers. Again a child, he was reciting a lesson under the shadow of his father's wrath, terrified lest he should fail and be punished.

He read till nine, sometimes glancing at the clock, watching the passage of time. Time often moved slowly with him. He often found the space between one event and another intolerably long, like the space between one meal and another at Langar. The room was like his home, like his room in Clifford's Inn, like all the rooms he ever lived in—clumsy and masculine, comfortable but rather shabby, furniture miscellaneous, but solid, ample, no character about it, and yet its very characterlessness giving it a sort of character—rooms against which lives wash like tides against a shore, each leaving a deposit of dust behind; little fortresses for the faint-hearted, haunted by empty bottles of port, and brave, abstract words, and half-formulated caresses, and abstract passion, and the dry rattle of dead ideas.

Breakfast heartened him. Sitting by a fire with a newspaper and a pipe, he felt less alien, less of an Ishmael (the name he gave himself). The creases in his clothes seemed to fall out. He settled snug and warm into them as, before he put them on, he had been settled snug and warm in bed. At about half-past nine he dropped into the Combination Room. Were there any of his set—the best set of his year—about? He saw one or two by the fire, sitting, lordly, in arm-chairs. How he wished his trousers would hang as theirs did! What would he not give if his coat might have such a cut! "Redfarm and Barnam's clothes never fitted me when I was



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at Cambridge." Even though he went to the same shop as the Nice People, paid the same prices, his clothes were quite different from theirs. Something happened—either the tailor was too contemptuous of him to take trouble, or clothes, when they were hung on his body, lost their character and became indeterminate. He sidled up to the best set of the year, sat down diffidently, was nodded to and nodded back. They half included him in their conversation. It made him nervous and excited. He wanted to shine, to force recognition from them. He wanted to say something that would startle and shock—"with the exception perhaps of some of the Psalms of David . . . I do not know that I should particularly mind my sister reading them . . . take good care never to read them myself." Startle and shock!—how otherwise to assert himself? He took out his pipe to begin, then put it back again. Why should they care for his remarks, laboriously conceived, pitiable attempt to make good all he lacked compared with them? What did they care for words, who had money and freedom and good clothes, who knew without thinking and sinned without shame? He sat silent, proud to be one of their number on any terms, scowled contemptuously at others too insignificant to be allowed even amongst nearer hangers-on.

At ten he went back to his room to read again for three more determined hours. The others would lounge on in the Combination Room, then perhaps stroll out together, insolently occupying the whole width of the pavement, everyone else humbly making way, as was fitting. They might sit over a pint of beer, or play a game of billiards,

or lay bets with one another. The last thing they would do would be to force themselves to sit reading for three hours, as he did. How he envied them their freedom! How he venerated them for taking full advantage of it! How he resented not being as they were! Their insolence was blessed in his eyes, and their idleness a nobility far beyond his industry.

At one he turned with relief to his piano. He played Handel, as he used to play in the Rectory in the early mornings, looking sidelong at the original of Ellen in *The Way of All Flesh* as she tidied the room. Handel soothed him. His enthusiasm for him began when he was eleven, and endured till his death. Now, after his six hours of reading, interspersed with half an hour's uneasy companionship, Handel refreshed him. He reached after his immense chords. His fingers contained great volumes of sound. It was the sort of immensity he could comprehend—all the appurtenances of religion without the faith, divine sound and fury without a deity, elemental, yet orderly, restrained unrestraint, prayers rolling forth from nowhere to nowhere, hymns and anthems intoned at the altar, not of an unknown, but a non-existent God. Handel comforted him and heartened him. He lost himself in Handel's music, forgetting indecision, discontent and diffidence, even his grudge, as his spirit's emptiness was filled with portentous sound.

His afternoon was spent at the river, a wintry afternoon, mists rising, and the Cam grey and bleak. He loved sunshine, tanned faces, open necks and bare arms. The Cam on a wintry afternoon was too like Langar to please him. It made demands on him, necessitated effort,

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resistance, whereas he craved for an environment which would absorb him into itself, relieve him of the loneliness and misery of having to hate people and institutions. The ruddiness of his face blotched. Red streaks stood out from a yellow base.

He was first in the boathouse, and sat, chilly, with his pipe, awaiting the others. They came one by one, not seeming to be cold, wrapped round with immense coloured scarves, their faces glowing, their breath a cheerful smoke. As they took off their clothes, he watched, glad not to have to take off his, and expose his puny body to a comparison with their strong, confident ones. Even naked, they were not as cold as he clothed. A warmth, he thought, came to them from within that he lacked. Their unself-conscious joy in living seemed to spread a glow through their limbs that he had never known, and that he envied and respected. Towering above him, they lifted the boat into the water and took their places. He bent with them backwards and forwards as they rowed. His voice as he called the stroke sounded shrilly across the water. They flushed with their exertion, muscles straining, hair falling over their eyes; and he grew chillier and chillier, voice shriller, body crouching inside his clothes.

At five he dined. He felt less at a disadvantage at dinner than on the river. Exchanging words and ideas across the table suited him better than rowing, committing them to paper better still, because then he could sharpen them at his leisure, and discharge them from secure cover. After dinner he went to Shilleto. The lecture droned on. It maddened him. Shilleto's face seemed like his father's, had the same folds of

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dry, yellow flesh, the same dull, misty eyes. His voice was like his father's, rather harsh, pompous, a dumb, opinionated voice; his body like his father's, graceless, unsavoury, his jokes and ideas stale and laboured. This was authority, Shilleto! How easy it would be to explode Shilleto! How easy to play his game and play it better! All the same he took notes, wrote down what Shilleto said in case it should come in handy sometime. He was miserly where information was concerned.

Walking back to his rooms when Shilleto's lecture was finished, the streets were dark. He made his way slowly through them. Now sensuality stirred in him. Lights broke out of rich darkness like white limbs out of clothes. His reading was finished. He could read no more. Even Handel was exhausted for that day. Two hours of Handel. Like Ernest in London when he comes out of prison, he walked about the streets of Cambridge "knowing better what he wanted to get than how to get it."

Jones points out that the incident in *The Way of All Flesh* when Ernest so admires Towneley's assurance in visiting a prostitute that he seeks one himself, but mistakes his woman, and so has to go to prison, cannot be authentic; "on the contrary, there had already been incidents which would have disqualified Butler from deserving the reproach addressed by the magistrate to Ernest, that, in spite of his education, he had not even the common sense to be able to distinguish between a respectable girl and one of a different sort."

Butler himself liked to create the impression that, as a man of the world, he had solved this

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particular problem in the most sensible way—by buying what he wanted. “I have a little needle-woman, a good little thing. I have given her a sewing-machine. I go to see her.” This is very reminiscent of Bernard Shaw’s “there was always some kind lady available.” A good little thing! Some kind lady!—there is something pathetically unconvincing about the expressions, like the blessings gipsy beggars shout, holding out their hands, and rattling pennies in a mug. It is probable that Butler, though he never made the mistake that Ernest did, was much worried by the fear of making it, and suffering the same consequences as Ernest, of shambling rather than walking between two policemen, his eyes staring “ghastly pale, and with despair branded upon every line of his face.” Curiously enough, Shaw has explained his comparatively blameless life by the fact that he had been brought up on, amongst other things, Handel, whose music for both Butler and Shaw seems to have been a valuable anodyne.

Before getting into bed at ten, Butler said his prayers, kneeling by the bedside, head devoutly bowed. He had not yet been able to nerve himself to stop saying them, and would still be frightened, if he got into bed without kneeling awhile, that the door might burst open and a wrathful father appear, or, worse, a tearful mother. In bed, his prayers said, he was secure. A day had gone by. He looked back on it, a space of time, six hours of reading, two of Handel, one of Shilleto, nearer hanger-on of the best set of his year, the chilly river, and shrill orders piped to his crew, the chilly boathouse, dinner, and the dark streets, and wrestling with himself.

"When he fell it was not till after a sharp tussle with a temptation that was more than his flesh and blood could stand, then he was very penitent and would go a fairly long time without sinning again." He had not read enough. What he had read was already forgotten, was not worth reading, nevertheless had to be read. He should have read more, practised drawing, played Handel for another hour, said this and this in the Combination Room, in Hall, smiled instead of darting, terrified, into a side street. He threw Shilleto's arguments about, confounding him, and hurling contemptuous remarks after him as he fled in confusion.

It had been taken for granted that Butler was to be ordained. Like Theobald, Canon Butler saw no opening for his son except the Church. His life was so circumscribed that ordination was the only career he knew anything about. To go in for trade was low-class, and in any case required influence that he had not got; medicine, still more painting, would subject Butler to "ordeals and temptations which these fond parents shrank from on behalf of their boy; he would be thrown amongst companions and familiarised with details which might sully him; and though he might stand, it was only too possible that he would fall"; the Law and the Army were respectable enough, but Canon Butler did not really know how people became lawyers and soldiers. His helplessness where practical affairs were concerned was pathetic. Butler despised it, but to a great extent shared it. He, too, despite his successful sheep-farming, moderately successful management of house-



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property, and unsuccessful directorship of a tannery, never really understood how people earned a living, as is shown by the astonishing naïveté of Ernest's attempts to do so when he comes out of prison. He never really conceived what life would be like without capital and investments; and the idea of not having them terrified him.

To Canon Butler it seemed as normal to go to Cambridge, take a degree, become ordained, get a living and augment its emolument by the interest on cautiously invested, inherited capital, as for a shepherd to turn his sheep out to pasture. There were, of course, people who did not go to Cambridge, take degrees and become ordained; even people with no inherited capital to invest cautiously or otherwise; but they were queer fish, outside Butler's and his father's range. Nice People all had capital and investments. So, when it came to arranging for his son's future, Canon Butler instinctively turned to the only means of earning a livelihood that he knew about. He sent Butler to Cambridge, as he had gone to Cambridge, with the intention of becoming a clergyman. The prospect of becoming a clergyman did not worry Butler. He accepted it as something that, in the ordinary course of events, followed upon taking a degree. As far as religion was concerned, he was neither hot nor cold. At divine service he was more bored than irritated; at family prayers it was his father's sluggish voice, his sisters sprawling over chairs, his mother's rapt gestures and ecstatically closed eyes, that offended rather than the idea of supplicating the Almighty. His mind would wander, and he would watch



bees trying to get honey out of flowers on the wall-paper, would be faintly amused at the idea of his parents praying always to be made *truly* honest, and at the way they all went on day after day confessing to having done what they should not have done, and left undone what they should have done, without registering any improvement.

This sort of respectable, middle-class religion had no terrors for him. He poked fun at it, but in a good-humoured, tolerant sort of way. In the preface to his last book, *Erewhon Revisited*, he wrote shortly before he died: "I would say that I have never ceased to profess myself a member of the more advanced wing of the English Broad Church. What those who belong to this wing believe, I believe. What they reject, I reject. No two people think absolutely alike on any subject, but when I converse with advanced Broad Churchmen I find myself in substantial harmony with them." What frightened him was any tendency towards zeal. Nice People sometimes went to church, but were never, never zealous. If religion meant being zealous, he must eschew it; if religion meant being exalted, speaking with tongues, losing control of himself, then, like marriage, it must at all costs be avoided.

Towards the end of his time at Cambridge he seems to have gone through, or at least to have seen the possibility of going through, a zealous phase. He stood and looked down on a living God from whom there would have been no escape, and turned, shuddering, away to his "more advanced wing of the English Broad Church," to his donnish ways, and gilt-edged securities, and distant adoration of Nice People. This is brought out in *The Way of All Flesh* in

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Ernest's connection with the Simeonites. The Simeonites lived in "dingy, tumble-down rooms, tenanted exclusively by the poorest undergraduates, who were dependent upon Sizarships and Scholarships for the means of taking their degrees . . . men of all ages, from mere lads to grey-haired old men . . . a seedy, gloomy-looking confrerie, who had as little to glory in in clothes and manners as in the flesh itself . . . unprepossessing in features, gait and manners, unkempt and ill-dressed beyond what can be easily described . . . a class apart, whose thoughts and ways were not as the thoughts and ways of Ernest and his friends."

Though the Simeonites are the exact opposite of Nice People, they have a "repellent attraction" for Ernest. He "disliked them, but he could not bring himself to leave them alone." If Towneley is his hero, Badcock, "the most notorious of all the Simeonites," is the abomination of desolation. The very names—Towneley and Badcock! How all Butler's misery, and pathetic immaturity, and protracted, because untested, illusions, are contained in their very names! Towneley and Badcock! Not only is Badcock "ugly, dirty, ill-dressed, bumptious, and in every way objectionable, but he was deformed and waddled when he walked, so that he had a nickname which I can only reproduce by calling it 'Here's my back and there's my back,' because the lower parts of his back emphasised themselves demonstratively as though about to fly off in different directions, like the two extreme notes in the chord of the augmented sixth, with every step he took." Badcock would not have been able to wave a hand gaily to Miss Snow

if he found her occupied with someone else, and exclaim: "I've come before my time," nor be heard laughing heartily when he was alone with her, nor bound upstairs to her room like "one over whom the force of gravity had little power." No, Badcock would slink after a prostitute as fearfully and furtively as Ernest himself, and groan and tremble in her arms if he ever managed to nerve himself to embrace her.

Butler himself had some connection with the Simeonites. He wrote a rather feeble parody of one of their pamphlets, which was first published in an article in *The Cambridge Magazine* by A. T. Bartholomew. In Ernest's case they bring about a conversion. He becomes zealous for a short time, even parades his zeal at home, thinking: Surely they'll be pleased about this, surely I've at last done something that's up their street! just as Butler thought that certain critics having suggested Lord Lytton as the possible author of *Erewhon* would be a source of pride to his father and mother. Theobald, however, does not approve of Ernest's zeal any more than Overton, the mature Butler, does; and Canon Butler was not such a snob as Butler imagined, and as he was himself, and derived no satisfaction from knowing that something his son had written, and of which he did not approve, had been thought to be by Lord Lytton.

It is improbable that Butler was, like Ernest, specifically converted by the Simeonites, but he must have felt very much as Ernest did about them—repelled, and, at the same time, fascinated. They must have given him, as they did Ernest, a peep into the Valley of the Shadow of Belief, and he fled, fled from it, terrified. Flight meant

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doubting, so he doubted. There was nothing inherently sceptical about his mind, quite the contrary. He was more credulous than most, sometimes, as in the case of gilt-edged securities, fabulously credulous. But he was cowardly; and it was his cowardice that made it necessary for him to doubt. At all costs he must get away from Badcock, as at all costs he had had to get away from Langar. Getting away from Langar meant doubting the sanctity of family ties and the necessity of honouring his father and his mother, and whether there was any justification at all for country clergymen and rectories; and getting away from Badcock meant doubting the existence of a personal God, doubting the whole validity of the Christian faith. But for his craving to get away from Langar and away from Badcock it is quite likely that it would never have occurred to him to question the validity of the family or the Church or Christianity, any more than it would have occurred to Milton to justify divorce if he had been happily married.

Butler was bracketed twelfth in the first class of the Classical Tripos of 1858. This was very good, as he spent his first two years at the University reading mathematics. After taking the examination, he went straight back to Langar, and went over the questions with his father, sitting in an armchair by the fire, rather sulky and frightened, while Canon Butler walked up and down his study with his hands behind his coat-tails—"Come, come, Sam, you knew that, surely you knew that!" airing his learning, remembered from his own tripos and not added to since, while Butler recited the answers he had

given in the same fearful, mechanical way that he had recited his lessons in that same room as a little boy. It had not yet occurred to him that now he was a grown-up, and with a little money coming to him in his own right, he might refuse to take part in such a cross-examination, just as it did not occur to him until his third year at Cambridge that the story of the Creation in Genesis might not be literally true. When he did begin to have doubts he started on an intensive study of the New Testament; but his doubts did not prevent him from going on with Ordination. In order to prepare himself to become a clergyman, he went to London, living as Ernest does (but in his case after Ordination) amongst the poor, and working as a lay assistant attached to the Parish of St. James's, Piccadilly.

His rooms were in a street off Regent Street, so that, as often happens in such cases, "living amongst the poor" was more an expression of an intention, than a statement of fact. If there were not many poor, however, there were plenty of prostitutes; and this was perhaps what he really wanted, not to patronise them, but to luxuriate in a sense of their nearness, of sin at its most lurid, most obvious, of Scarlet Women plying their hateful trade and ending up, as all sinners must, in degradation and death.

Nothing is more characteristic of Butler's times than the prevailing attitude towards prostitution. It was the classic sin, the background against which domestic virtues showed up to the best advantage, a pageant with venereal disease and suicide in the Thames as the high lights, which Nature played continuously to hearten virtuous men and women. Dickens carried this attitude

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to fabulous depths of absurdity; and Ernest in Ashpit Place is Butler in Heddon Street, watching the comings and goings of his female fellow-lodgers, wondering: Is she one? Is she? watching the comings and goings of their clients, half enviously, half pityingly, like plain, elderly women watching the reckless promiscuity of someone who is younger and more beautiful than they; half tempted to peep through the keyhole and see what really happens, half to flee lest evil befall him; as a compromise, coming out of his room when he hears footsteps, and glancing through doors just before they shut, listening to fragments of conversation, finding significance in gestures and smiles.

Butler did not really like living amongst the poor. The enthusiasm for good works, for a zealous and literal following of Christ, such as Badcock implanted in Ernest, and which, in his case, led him to become a ritualist, soon evaporated. When he met a Nice Person in the street his eye faltered. Nice People did not go and live amongst the poor any more than "they turned to the classics when they were no longer forced to read them." When Ernest is living in Ashpit Place he runs into Towneley, and feels his disapproval, senses his contemptuous appraising of his clothes, his awareness of something in his expression which reflects his attitude of mind—patronising, pitying, timid and anxious too—towards those whose souls he believes it is his duty to try to save. Towneley looks "as full of life and good spirits as ever, and if possible even handsomer than he had been at Cambridge. . . . Ernest felt that he quailed as he saw Towneley's eye wander to his white necktie and saw that he



was being reckoned up, and rather disapprovingly reckoned up, as a parson." He screws up all his courage and ventures the opinion that poor people are very nice. "Towneley took this for what it was worth and nodded assent, whereupon Ernest imprudently went further and said: 'Don't you like poor people very much yourself?' Towneley gave his face a comical but good-natured screw, and said quietly, but slowly and decidedly, 'No, no, no,' and escaped." This settles Ernest. He realises from this moment that "between the upper and lower classes there was a gulf which amounted to an impassable barrier." That evening, when he gets home, he thinks it all over. Who is likely to be right, Towneley or, say, Pryer, a fellow curate? "His heart returned answer to itself without a moment's hesitation. The faces of men like Towneley were open and kindly; they looked as if at ease themselves, and as though they would set all who had to do with them at ease as far as might be. The faces of Pryer and his friends were not like this."

Ernest's realisation that there is an impassable gulf between the rich and the poor, and that he belongs to the rich side of the gulf, is followed by another shock. He visits Mr. Shaw, a free-thinking tinker, who represents Butler's idea of a proletarian Towneley, one whose common sense confutes the learning of scholars, the plain man putting to shame the pampered product of an expensive, but unsound, education. Mr. Shaw talks like this: "You Oxford and Cambridge gentlemen think you have examined everything. I have examined very little myself except the bottom of old kettles and saucepans, but if you



will answer me a few questions I will tell you whether you have examined much more than I have." Ernest's answers to his questions are miserably inadequate, and Mr. Shaw says: "Now go upstairs and read the accounts of the Resurrection correctly without mixing them up, and have a clear idea of what it is that each writer tells us, then if you feel inclined to pay me another visit I shall be glad to see you, for I shall know you have made a good beginning and mean business." When Ernest has done what Mr. Shaw tells him to, "the 'No, no, no,' which still sounded in his ears as he had heard it from Towneley, came ringing up more loudly still from the very pages of the Bible itself, and in respect of the most important of all the events which are recorded in it."

The "No, no, no's" final crescendo comes after the fatal visit to Miss Snow, when Ernest, hearing Towneley's hearty laugh through her door after his inglorious withdrawal, curses the hour that he was born, kicks his Bible into a corner, knows at last what he wants, seeks out Miss Maitland, imagining her to be like Miss Snow, and does that to her which, ten minutes later, sends "a scared, insulted girl, flushed and trembling, hurrying from Mrs. Jupp's house as fast as her agitated state would let her," and Ernest, between two policemen, to the police-station, and subsequently to prison. Now living amongst the poor is over and done with. No more visiting and preaching now. He knows now how much he hates being a clergyman, how much easier is Mr. Shaw's part than his, how much more amusing. The prison chaplain provides an opportunity for practising Mr. Shaw's part on

his own account, and he finds that it comes easily to him.

Butler's own determination not to go into the Church was based on the same reasons as Ernest's to get out of it. He felt that, as a clergyman, he would be looked down on by Nice People; he had found out, like Mr. Shaw, that the account of Christ's resurrection differed widely in the four Gospels, and he wanted to free himself from a sense of sin, to be able to sin gracefully and heartily, like Towneley. Except in *The Way of All Flesh*, which, as novels do, reveals the deepest secrets of his heart, he accentuated the second of these reasons. For instance, in 1879 he contributed a series of letters under different pseudonyms to *The Examiner*, discussing whether a clergyman with a family and no private means ought to resign his living and give up his Orders when, in middle life, he finds that his faith in the Church's doctrine has quite gone. Butler started the correspondence with two letters signed "*An Earnest Clergyman.*" These describe his own mental state as a young man: "There was not one of all the friends and companions of my boyhood and earlier manhood who had not been taught to accept the miracles as self-evident propositions, and to believe in a personal God who could speak, act, feel pleasure and pain, go here and there, even as we ourselves. In my undergraduate days I never met a single person who entertained the faintest shadow of doubt upon any of these points. If any one of us had met such a doubter, we should have cut him. All our masters at school, all our tutors at College, confirmed us in our belief—not one of them ever gave us a word of warning that there

was another side to the question of Christian evidences; all books in which any attempt was made to state that other side were so excluded from our school and college training that we did not even know their names." The suggestion is that such a state of mind was normal at that time—the middle of the nineteenth century, when Butler himself was at Cambridge.

"An Earnest Clergyman" goes on to point out how between 1844, when the *Vestiges of Creation* appeared, and 1854, when *Essays and Reviews* appeared, nothing of note was published "that could give uneasiness to orthodoxy," and how, therefore, the belatedness of his own discovery of the vulnerability of the Anglican Creed was not surprising. None the less, it remains an astonishing fact, as Miss Savage remarked in one of her letters about *The Way of All Flesh*, that a person of Butler's intellectual attainments, who could write an essay like "On English Composition and Other Matters" when he was an undergraduate, and get a first in Classics after only one year's reading, should never have questioned, for instance, the literal accuracy of the Book of Genesis. Nor does the explanation he puts into the mouth of "An Earnest Clergyman" really meet the case, for Butler was not, like him, "without brilliancy," a painstaking, sincere mediocrity, with happy memories of a childhood spent in a pious home, and a liking for the work and way of life of a country clergyman, a simple, good soul. On the contrary, he was brilliant, complex, not at all good, and looked back with horror on a childhood spent in a country rectory.

How did it come about that Butler, like "An

Earnest Clergyman," was able to accept so much on trust until he was in his twenty-third year? The answer lies in "An Earnest Clergyman's" remark that if he or his friends had come across anyone who entertained the faintest shadow of doubt regarding the existence of a personal God, they would have cut him. It was Butler's passion to be ordinary—that is, a Nice Person—which kept him out of contact with unorthodox opinion much more than its absence from the University during the years that he was in residence. He instinctively disliked zealous opposition to the Church, just as he instinctively disliked its zealous upholding. Bradlaugh, say, would have been in his eyes only an inverted Badcock, equally repellent, yet, again like Badcock, having a sort of fascination which made it the more necessary to avoid all contact with him. There was something of himself in Badcock. He recognised it, and so shrank from him, as Eurasians shrink from Indians. He, so essentially a voice crying in the wilderness, hated all other such voices, loved, not, like Marx, the mob's roar, but the hum of middle-class conversation. The Dictatorship of Nice People for him, not of the Proletariat.

What he realised, when he was living in Heddon Street, was that just being a clergyman would cut him off from the Nice People, that whenever he met one of them his eye would wander disapprovingly to his white necktie, and that if he wanted to go on being a nearer hanger-on of the best set of his time, it would be safer not to go into the Church at all. His spiritual crisis came to a head in a very typical way. Amongst other activities, he conducted a class for "lads." Two

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or three evenings a week he would sit with them and talk about religion, not directly, but through the medium of art, literature or games, moralising from some experience on the river—"as you get off your stretcher so you will meet your God"—or from a piece of news, or a poem, which he would first read aloud in a deep, earnest voice. He liked it in a way, and he hated it in a way. The company of lads pleased him; and so did being in authority and teaching. Even when he gave up his lads, he went on teaching. His *Note Books* are as full of pious reflections as a Sunday-School lesson. On the other hand, whenever he thought of the Nice People, and imagined what they would think of him, sitting amongst his lads, the contempt they would feel for anyone who tolerated such company, still more enjoyed cutting a dash in it, he hated what he was doing. Then his voice faltered. He brought his poetry-reading to an abrupt end, cut short his moralising, and hurried away.

One day he found out by chance that some of his lads had not been baptised, and amongst them the most attractive, the nearest to being Nice People that was possible in such a lowly company. He seized on the point, like a lawyer on some admission carelessly made by a witness. If they were not baptised and the others were, how was it that this inferior state of grace was not manifest? It should have been apparent. The unbaptised should be as easily distinguished from the baptised as sheep from goats, whereas he had never detected the slightest difference between them. If there was no difference, then the Sacrament of Baptism became meaningless, and if it was meaningless, so were other Sacra-

ments too—the whole conception of Sacramentalism, in fact; and if that went, what was left of the Church's doctrine?

A similar episode occurs in the "Memoir of the late John Pickard Owen," which prefaces *The Fair Haven*, and which is really a first sketch for *The Way of All Flesh*—"He (John Pickard Owen) was accustomed to teach in a school for the poorest children every Sunday afternoon, a task for which his patience and his good temper well fitted him. On one occasion, however, while he was explaining the effect of baptism to one of his favourite pupils, he discovered to his great surprise that the boy had never been baptised. He pushed his enquiries further, and found that out of the fifteen boys in his class only five had been baptised, and, not only so, but that no difference in disposition or conduct could be discovered between the regenerate and the unregenerate. . . . In spite of a certain impetuosity of natural character, he was also of a matter-of-fact and experimental turn of mind; he therefore went through the whole school, which numbered about a hundred boys, and found out who had been baptised and who not. The same results appeared. The majority had not been baptised; yet the good and bad dispositions were so distributed as to preclude all possibility of maintaining that the baptised boys were better than the unbaptised."

Butler was as naïve in his demolition of the Christian Faith as he had been in his acceptance of it, seriously arguing later on, for instance, that if there was a personal God, it must be possible to locate Him and investigate His habits, and that, since He had never been located, He did



not exist. Faith and scepticism were alike systems that he built up or broke down according to a fixed set of rules, as philanderers build up or break down relationships with women, first accepting everything about them—their thoughts, their gestures, their tone of voice, their very physical imperfections—as part of their appeal, and then pointing to the same qualities as reasons for finding them repellent. Neither Butler's faith nor his scepticism was from within. They were façades that he threw up, equally fantastic, unreal belief followed by unreal doubt, naïve acceptance of Baptism followed by naïve rejection of Baptism.

In writing to his father he gave another, and as trivial a reason to explain his disinclination to become ordained. "You bid me state," he wrote, "the portion of the Articles that I specially object to. I do not like doing so, for I fear it will pain you and my mother considerably; but the opinion I have formed is one that I am ready to resign if fairly beaten. At the same time I must fairly confess that I believe the mass of evidence would make far more strongly with me than against me. The passage in the Articles is this: Art. XV. 'But all we the rest, although baptised, and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things' (James iii. 2); 'and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (John i. 8)—believing for my own part that a man can, by making use of the ordinary means of grace, attain a condition in which he can say, 'I do not offend *knowingly* in any thing either habitually or otherwise, and believe that whereas once on a time I was full of sin, I have now been cleansed from all sin and



am holy even as Christ was holy upon earth.' Nay, more, that unless a man can at some time before his death say such words as these he is not incorporate with Christ and cannot be saved. I know not how to put my thoughts in less strong language and yet express them fairly and fully: I grant that to beings of finite intelligence like ourselves there will be, it may be, certain sins of ignorance which we could not be fairly chargeable for having committed, many of us having been educated to such a belief and never having had the means of discovering the falsehood thereof: but that no sin that is known to be sin will appear in him that is incorporate with Christ."

The argument harks back to his childish wonder at people going on confessing to having done what they should not have done, and left undone what they should have done, Sunday after Sunday without registering any improvement, and is on a par with his assumption that, since it would have been impossible for Hector and Achilles to run three times round the city of Ilius, Homer, in making them do so, must have been "fooling an audience whom he despises, and at whom he is covertly laughing," or with his interpretation of "So I, made lame by Fortune's dearest spite" as meaning that Shakespeare was lamed in consequence of a practical joke played on him by Mr. W. H. and his friends. As allegory was beyond Butler's comprehension, so was any expression of truth in other than intellectual, even mathematical terms. If there was forgiveness of sins there must be sinlessness; if God numbered the hairs on each individual head, then He must keep a ledger and adjust the entries day by day as hairs fell out or were restored. A conception

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such as of sin being innate in human nature, and yet of human beings being made in God's image, of miserable sinners being forgiven their sins so that they are spotless, and still being miserable sinners in need of forgiveness, or of a God who is infinitely concerned with men and women and their doings, as a father with his children, and yet who sees them as grass, one day growing and the next thrown into the oven—such conceptions were beyond him. He could not get inside them. They baffled him, at the same time intrigued him. He tried to estimate them, but with the wrong measure, like someone trying to weigh a scent or calculate the area of an emotion.

A tedious, and sometimes acrimonious correspondence followed his letter to his father about Article XV. Jones says that this correspondence is approximately the same as the one between Theobald and his father in *The Way of All Flesh*, but does not give any of Canon Butler's actual letters. The two correspondences are alike in that their subject is a son's reluctance to be a clergyman and a father's wish that he should carry out his original intention of becoming one; otherwise there is not much similarity between them. Theobald's father is brutal and entirely frank, and Theobald craven, whereas Canon Butler's letters show rather misunderstanding than a desire to hurt, and Butler's pathetic inconsistency and indecision, alternations of defiance and capitulation. For instance, Theobald's father writes:

"DEAR THEOBALD,

"I have received yours. I am at a loss to conceive its motive, but am very clear as



to its effect. You shall not receive a single sixpence from me till you come to your senses. Should you persist in your folly and wickedness, I am happy to remember I have yet other children whose conduct I can depend upon to be a source of credit and happiness to me.—Your affectionate but troubled father,  
G. PONTIFEX."

and Canon Butler :

"DEAR SAM,

"I should have this day written to friends to make enquiries about some practical farmers who would take you as a pupil but for one expression in your letter, and will still write in receipt of your reply if you still wish it. You say with regard to a tutorship, 'I should have taken a tutorship in October had I simply been refused being an artist.' Now I pass over the gross impropriety of a son writing to his father thus, but would it not be much better that you should still take the tutorship if you can get it, or will you take any of the other schemes that have been proposed? You say yourself you do not care about being a farmer. I know you to be naturally unfitted for it. You throw away your education, and would fall into a class not likely to be congenial to you. If after this you still adhere to farming I will write to ascertain where you can be placed. Before I conclude this note I should wish to make one further effort to make you see the sort of tone which your letters have. I have alluded to what you said about the tutorship 'already. I shall not go through every para-

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graph, but this tone runs throughout, in some places most offensively, as in talking of a letter of your father's as one which 'no person of any age would receive without a determination to avoid the like.' It is best to be clear and distinct. I will continue your allowance as far as £100 a year. In law I should have heavy fees and expenses to pay which will not allow me to do more. Neither am I disposed to sacrifice the other children to you. If you will not take that profession, and can see a tutorship, good. If you can get a mastership in a school, good, but not so good, and if you can devise another plan of your own I'll hear it but under no fetter to accede. You take no notice of my last letter, which yet requires an answer. God give you a seeing eye someday. Still your affectionate father,

T. BUTLER."

Butler's letter announcing his determination not to go into the Church caused consternation at Langar. There was Sam settled, a lay worker in a parish, soon to become ordained, be presented with a living, marry; and now everything was uncertain again. Canon Butler paced about; Mrs. Butler fluttered round him, bringing him tea, comforting words, tremulous, like a frightened bird; May and Harrie were silent, inclined to be resentful at Sam's future having so much importance in their parents' eyes. Canon Butler went to his desk. The letter must be answered. He wrote slowly, forming each word carefully. It was, after all, a change from preparing ser-

mons, from his Harmony of the Old and New Testaments; a change even from collecting and classifying fauna.

What worried Butler's father and mother even more than his not going into the Church was his proposal to take up art. This opened up fearful vistas. They had shadowy ideas of models, irregular ways of living, drawing from the nude; they saw Butler drawing from the nude, and shuddered. Medicine would be as bad—dead bodies instead of live, cutting them up instead of drawing them. Canon Butler became emphatic—"Never shall I countenance such a course." After all, he still had the whip hand, since he still paid for Butler. Did he remember a similar scene with his own father? Even if he did—the Navy was one thing, and studying art another. There was no nudity in the Navy, either dead or alive, either to dissect or to draw. Or perhaps he was having his own back, determined to make his son yield as easily as he had himself yielded.

As a temporary measure Butler moved from the Parish of St. James's, Piccadilly, from living amongst the poor, back to Cambridge. It is a haven of refuge for such as he. Its quiet enfolded him as sleep the weary; its grey detachment healed his wounded spirit; in its aloof peace he could think without ever suffering the hurts and the pangs and the yearning which contact with life always involved for him. "If I had remained at St. John's I should probably have got a fellowship," he wrote in 1901. "Stanwell of my year, also a Johnian, got one; he was only 20th in the first class, whereas I was bracketed 12th. I cannot doubt that the fellowship he got would have been given to me. I am

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very glad it never was, for like enough I should have stuck on at Cambridge till now!" He would have stuck on at Cambridge, peacefully watching the passage of his days, his mind heavy with slow, abstract thought, sheltered behind thick curtains, with coals to heap on his fire, and large dinners to consume slowly with men of like tastes.

His object in returning to Cambridge was to get pupils. He got two. Also he studied drawing at the Cambridge School of Art, where he received "first-rate lessons which I enjoy exceedingly." To quieten his parents' fears about drawing from the nude, he wrote that he "commenced with curved symmetrical lines—very difficult to copy accurately. I then went through a course of hands, and am now going through a course of feet; I have just blocked out the Venus de Medici's toes." Even Canon and Mrs. Butler must have found blocking out the Venus de Medici's toes harmless enough. In the same way, when he spoke of taking up medicine, he always carefully explained that it was the homœopathic sort.

When it was finally decided that he was not to go into the Church, his parents began to rack their brains about what he was to do. He made various suggestions himself—a schoolmaster, the Army, farming; and then, when Canon Butler took them up, and began to go into ways and means of carrying them out, Butler forgot that he had made them in the first place, and angrily imagined that his father was trying to bully him into becoming a schoolmaster or a soldier or a farmer against his will. He read his father's letters over and over, brooded on them at night

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when he lay awake in bed. Wasn't it obvious what he was doing?—using his money to try to make him become a clergyman against his will. Wasn't it obvious that he was shaking his fist at him, and saying: "Do thus and thus, or I disinherit you"? Lying in bed, he planned indignant answers, cutting, vehement retorts, and, when he came actually to write, softened them into hints, half complaints, addressed these to his mother rather than his father; in the hope that she might intercede for him. Not yet, he kept saying to himself; I won't break with them just yet.

Canon Butler tried to be dignified and reasonable. His line was: though you behave outrageously, and write things to me that no son should write to a father, yet I refuse to lose my temper. "Most fathers," he wrote, "would, I believe, on the receipt of this morning's letter have been intensely angry. I am much distressed—distressed at your opinion of myself, distressed at your obvious callousness of heart. I will not suffer, however, that I should be provoked to do other than my judgment prompts me to do. I judged it was for your good that I should not encourage you in your artist's career. This is my sole motive for refusing to assist you in it. You have shown no decided genius for drawing. You are as yet at the commencing point. To all except men of a decided professional talent it is a very uphill task, and I think still I should do wrong to afford you the slightest possible encouragement to a course for which for aught I know you may be just as unfitted as for a soldier, lawyer, schoolmaster or tutor. You speak as if in none of these professions good



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could be done. Pray what good are you to effect for your generation in drawing? You speak as if I had thrust these things on you. Do let me beg and beseech you to consider with whom they originated. I believe I may perhaps have suggested the law, I'm not sure about it; but the Army was yours, the mastership in a school was your own earnest wish when you went to college, the tutorship was yours. I mentioned these things because I thought they were such things as you might like. What offence I could have given for the suggestion I can't conceive. The notion that I should disinherit you is yours, not mine. I said only that I would not contribute to this career of folly. Neither do I see reason to alter this view. The notion that I will not pay you the next two quarters is yours, not mine. I stated definitely the contrary. . . ."

They persistently misunderstood each other. Butler read into his father's letters his conception of his father, his idea of how he treated him, his own martyrdom; and Canon Butler read into Butler's impudence, callousness, deliberate wounding of his and his wife's feelings. The substance of their letters—on Butler's side fear of being left without money, and on his parents' side fear that their son might be brought into contact with temptations he would not be strong enough to resist—was buried under fantasy. Butler saw himself as a defenceless youth bravely standing up to parental brutality, Canon Butler as a self-sacrificing father bitterly disappointed in a beloved son; and really they were just afraid of themselves, of one another, of life. There was no serious attempt on the part of Canon Butler to coerce Butler into becoming a clergyman, or

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anything else; no serious intention on Butler's part to refuse his father's help, to break away. Their fighting was shadow-fighting, utterly unreal. Yet how zealously they fought! With what gusto they drove their fists into air, sparred and took up threatening attitudes; spending sleepless nights turning over and over the nothingness of their dispute, anxious hours bent over sheets of paper swelling out its nothingness into ponderous indignation.

"You would," Butler wrote to his mother, "with the best intentions in the world make me a bed that I know would not fit me. I know that when I am in, escape is impossible; and, knowing that I have duties to myself to perform even more binding on me than those to my parents, with all respect adopt the alternative of rejecting the pounds, shillings and pence and going in search of my own bread in my own way. No man has any right to undertake any profession for which he does not honestly believe himself well qualified, to please any other person. I should be preferring the hollow peace that would be patched up by my submission (for you could never forget that this submission had been obtained by money pressure), and the enjoyment of more money, to undergoing the great risk and trial which I see before me. I am old enough by this time to know my own mind and deliberately accede to my father's proposal that I should receive no more from him if I refuse to do what he wishes; it is fair play; I don't question his right to do what he likes with his own—I question his wisdom greatly, but neither his motives nor his determination to stick to them. One thing I trust—that is, that I shall be allowed to correspond

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with Langar; for though I am not in the least uneasy about my right to choose my profession at my age, I know that I have no right to either write insulting letters to you or to cease informing you and hearing from you how we are mutually faring, unless compelled to do so by one or other of you. I should be sorry to think that any connection other than the money connection should cease. That I regard as ceased already. . . . One thing in my father's letter struck me as either an additional proof that he is perfectly unaware of my real disposition and character or else as a most undeserved and ungenerous taunt. He said: 'Neither am I disposed to sacrifice the other children to you.' Either he supposes that I would see one penny taken from them to supply me withal, in which case he betrays great ignorance of my disposition, or else by such remarks as these he is completing the estrangement between us. I never asked him for an allowance. What he gave I took and have employed well. . . . I am not petulantly in a huff, imagining that you will come round when you see I won't give in. I don't expect anything of the kind, don't expect to receive a penny from my father now or at his death, which I heartily desire may be long averted. But I say: Rather than give up my Christian liberty to choose a profession in which I honestly believe I can succeed, should be able to speak the truth in and get my living by—rather than give up this I give up the money which my father has allowed me till now."

This might seem to settle the matter and, as Overton would have put it, in a manly and honourable way. Butler renounces his birthright in order to be free to live his own life in his own

way. He puts aside "the pounds, shillings and pence" and bravely faces "the great risk and trial which I see before me." It is no question, with him, of imagining that his father will come round when he sees he won't give in, but of his "Christian liberty" to choose a profession in which he honestly believes he can succeed. He even goes so far as to renounce his expectations at his father's death, which he "heartily desires may be long averted." Yet seven days later he is gratefully accepting Canon Butler's offer to pay for him to become a farmer.

Jones gives this letter in full in the *Memoir* "because it seems to me to be remarkably mature for a young man of twenty-three years and five months." Actually it is more subtly dishonest even than Christina's letter to "my two dear boys." Butler had not the remotest intention of foregoing his present claims on his father, or his claims on his estate. His resolution—if he ever was resolved—to do so did not last even a full week. All his talk about "Christian liberty," and his being allowed still to correspond with Langar, and facing great risks and trials, was insincere. Neither then, nor ever, did he dare to face breaking with Canon Butler, not because he hungered for a father's love and still kept hoping that it would be forthcoming, but because he hungered for an allowance. Jones makes no attempt to explain how, after such a letter, there could be a whole series of subsequent letters "discussing farming in England . . . about the refusal to be a tutor and the alternatives of becoming a publisher, a homœopathic doctor, or an artist," any more than he attempts to explain how Butler could write to Miss Savage about

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Pauli's reactions to *Erewhon*: "The fact is he is frightened out of his wits about it, and expects my father to cut me off with a shilling; but he does not say this because he knows I should fly at him if he advised me to let my father's will enter into the matter at all," and then on Pauli's advice cut out a large passage for fear his father might take offence at it and disinherit him.

After a large number of letters had been exchanged, it was decided that Butler should emigrate to New Zealand, and go in for sheep-farming, Canon Butler to finance him to the extent of £5,000, £2,000 down and £3,000 in instalments, or as a lump sum on three months' notice. He sailed towards the end of September, 1859, and has described the scene in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*—a windy, rainy, cold day, confusion amongst the emigrants, a serious-looking gentleman in a white tie distributing tracts. He unpacked and arranged his books in his cabin; then, at ten o'clock, when everyone else was in bed, he went up on to the poop. There was no sound but the clanging of Gravesend church clocks, the pattering of rain on the decks, the rush of the river against the ship's side. He returned, meditative, to his cabin. Then a dramatic thing, not described in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, happened. He undressed, and got into bed without saying his prayers. It was the first night in all his life that he had got into bed without saying them. All through his doubts about baptised and unbaptised lads, about Article XV, all through the months of wrangling with his father, throwing away pounds, shillings and pence, and then kneeling in the dust to pick them up again, he had gone on

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saying his prayers. Sailing down the Thames on his way to New Zealand, rain pattering on the deck and the river's rush beside him, he did not say them. "I dropped saying my prayers suddenly once for all with *malice prepense*, on the night of the 29th of September, 1859, when I went on board the *Roman Emperor* to sail for New Zealand. I had said them the night before, and doubted not that I was always going to say them as I always had done hitherto. That night, I suppose, the sense of change was so great that it shook them quietly off. I was not then a sceptic; I had got as far as disbelief in infant baptism, but no farther. I felt no compunction, however, about leaving off my morning and evening prayers—simply I could no longer say them."

### III

#### NICE PERSON

"You say the Positivists were ugly. You should have seen the people at Howe's the other night. They were hideous, but there were all sorts of great guns amongst them. I think clever people always are ugly."—Letter to Miss Savage 1873.

By stopping saying his prayers Butler turned his back on adventure. As he said was the case with Lamarck, henceforth he had "brain on the brain." All the life, all the sap in him mounted to his head, so that his body died. Unlike Swift, who died from the head downwards, Butler died from the feet upwards. Stopping saying his prayers was the death of his body. It involved stopping everything else except thinking; meant that, for instance, "becoming thick" with Isabella was a reason for keeping away from Arona, where she lived; "I have never seen any woman comparable with her," he wrote, "and kept out of her way on purpose after leaving Arona as the only thing to be done, for we had become thick. I kept away from Arona for years: but at last returned with Jones, for I wanted to show her to him and to see her again, which I might now safely do. She was at the hotel door, leaning against the side of the house, as we came up from the quay, looking much older and, as usual, very sad when her face was in repose. It made me feel unhappy. . . ." In the same way, after he had stopped saying his



prayers, he sometimes went to a Mass when he was abroad, even to an Anglican service when he was staying with church-goers in England, or borrowed a prayer-book from Mrs. Bovill when he visited Dr. Mandell Creighton, or asked Heaven to keep and bless Hans Faesch. Prayers haunted him as Isabella did; and he broke with them, as with Isabella, with "high-class modern music," with all his early enthusiasms except Handel, and then, when he felt it was safe, renewed acquaintance and was sad. Henceforth he set himself to live by mind. In the space he cleared by stopping saying his prayers his grudge waxed great, threw out branches, new shoots, occupied his whole being. Nothing could happen to him. When anything threatened to happen he fled, then cautiously returned to see if the danger had passed, like someone in a gas attack coming out from cover and taking a cautious sniff.

On the voyage to New Zealand he read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He also took concertina lessons from one of the passengers. "Besides this," he recorded in a letter home, "I have the getting up and management of the choir. We practise three or four times a week; we chant the Venite, Glorias and Te Deums, and sing one hymn. I have two basses, two tenors, one alto and lots of girls . . . and have been glad by this means to make the acquaintance of many of the poorer passengers. . . . Almost every evening four of us have a very pleasant rubber which never gets stale. . . . One great amusement I have forgotten to mention—that is, shuffleboard, a game which consists in sending some round wooden platters along the

deck into squares chalked and numbered from one to ten. "This game will really keep one quite hot in the coldest weather if played with spirit." Already his pattern for living was beginning to emerge—Gibbon, then *The Origin of Species*, then Homer and Shakespeare (he never read anything to speak of except these and associated literature); concertina lessons, then lessons in counterpoint from Rockstro; Venite, Glorias and Te Deums; then Handel, and the operas *Narcissus* and *Ulysses* that he wrote with Jones; one friend who was bass, tenor and alto, and his confidential clerk, Mr. Cathie, instead of the poorer passengers, and nightly patience instead of a nightly rubber that never got stale, and shuffleboard, plenty of shuffleboard, with ideas instead of platters.

Butler was successful in New Zealand. His father gave him altogether something between four and five thousand pounds, which he invested in a sheep-run of his own. He found his fellow-colonists uninteresting; "It does not do," he wrote to Langar, "to speak about John Sebastian Bach's fugues or pre-Raphaelite pictures." "The colonists," he noted in the same letter, "are all gentlemen and sons of gentlemen, and one of them is a Cambridge man, who took a high second class a year or two before my time." This particular colonist had, he discovered with delighted astonishment, a copy of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* under his bed. Roughing it did not really appeal to him, though sometimes when he was out on his horse Doctor, prospecting for sheep-country, or fording a difficult river, he exulted in his adventurousness, and wished that some of those who had despised his physical prowess at school and at Cambridge could see

him. Even then he was regarded as a "literary man; his snug sitting-room was fitted with books and easy-chairs—a piano, also, upon which he was no mean performer." When he was troubled he would turn to the piano, washing away his unhappiness, as he had at Langar and Cambridge, in the massive flow of Handel's music. One of his fellow-colonists wrote of him at this time that he "was hot-tempered, and anything approaching to ridicule where he himself was concerned was a mortal insult," which made him "turn pale with passion" and ride off by himself. Gradually he cured himself of openly manifesting resentment when his vanity was hurt. As a boy a tendency to do so had been marked in him, and, according to an old scrap-book, which he was partly responsible for resurrecting, had earned him at school the nickname of "backbiter." The same tendency persisted in New Zealand, but by the time Jones knew him he had found a better way of dealing with "ridicule where he himself was concerned." This was to ridicule back. He wrote down and made a philosophy out of the feelings which, when he was a young sheep-farmer, took all the colour from his face and sent him off alone, trembling with impotent rage.

He wrote home at length and regularly; and Canon Butler collected his letters into a little volume, wrote a preface, and published it. Butler could never bear to look at this, his first book, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*. He said the mere thought of it made him blush for shame, though he mentioned a few years before his death in a letter that it had been fetching a pound a copy in New Zealand. It was, he said,

"deeply tainted with Langar," written only for the consumption of his father and mother, and therefore insincere; not his own thoughts and feelings, but theirs; studies like most of his pictures, instead of, like "Family Prayers," "out of my own head." One passage in the book he sent as an article to the *Eagle*, where it appeared as "Crossing the Rangitata." It does not differ much from the original. The taint of Langar is as marked whether he is writing for the consumption of his parents or of undergraduates.

Butler had much the same attitude towards his fellow-colonists in New Zealand as he had had towards his fellow-undergraduates at Cambridge—aware of his difference from them, half envying them, idealising the qualities they had and that he lacked, and half contemptuous of their philistinism. After all, he wrote to his father, "it may be questioned whether the intellect is not as well schooled here as at home, though in a very different manner"; at the same time, there were John Sebastian Bach and the Pre-Raphaelites. He gladly approved the principle that "our object was commercial, and not scientific; our motive was pounds, shillings and pence; and where this failed us, we lost all excitement and curiosity," but feared "they were weak enough to have a little hankering after the view" from the top of a pass they were crossing, though "we treated such puerility with the contempt that it deserved, and sat down to rest ourselves at the foot of a small glacier."

He lived on his run, named by him Mesopotamia, short and so dark that he was sometimes mistaken for a Maori, with his shelves of books

(How these lovers of what is unself-conscious are haunted by shelves of books! Even the game-keeper in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was a reading man, and had his Home University Library staring down on the very bed where he and Lady Chatterley—*Lady Chatterley*! It has the same derivation as Towneley and Badcock—were purified by sensuality), and his piano, and his casts for drawing from, proud to be roughing it in the wilds, a “literary man,” always and irretrievably. All the circumstances of adventure were present, but no adventure. He was like King Midas. He touched, and things, people even, turned, not to gold, but to ideas. The life went out of them—“on the whole, there are many advantageous results from a sea-voyage. One’s geography improves apace, and numberless incidents occur pregnant with interest to a landsman; moreover, there are sure to be many on board who have travelled far and wide, and one gains a good deal of information about all sorts of races and places. One effect is, perhaps, pernicious; but this will probably soon wear off on land. It awakens an adventurous spirit, and kindles a strong desire to visit almost every spot on the face of the globe. The captain yarns about California and the China Seas—the doctor about Valparaiso and the Andes—another raves about Hawaii and the islands of the Pacific—while a fourth will compare nothing to Japan. The world begins to feel very small when one finds one can get half round it in three months; and one mentally determines to visit all these places before coming back again, not to mention a good many more. I search my diary in vain to find some pretermitted adventure wherewith to

give you a thrill . . . but I can find none. The mail is going; I will write again by the next."

So he wrote to Langar, and Canon Butler read it out to the assembled family in his dry voice, and the others made their dry comments, Mrs. Butler's tremulously dry, like a stretch of desert in a storm. Then in his study, before beginning work on his *Harmony*, Canon Butler went through the letter, correcting, punctuating, and filed it with the others. Tainted with Langar!—it was Langar, very Langar of very Langar. It made the world seem not merely small, but nothing; made California and the China Seas, Valparaiso, the Andes and Hawaii as commonplace as the *Idylls of the King*, which Butler rejoiced to find under a fellow-colonist's bed. Since stopping saying his prayers it was all up with him. He must bore and be bored, the world dead now, and he fated to wander about its deadness, like a man he saw in Cheap-side—"biting his middle finger and talking cruelly to himself."

Butler knew he was like Midas, that his touch was deathly; and, as Midas might have fled to the cellar where he kept his gold because that at least did not change when he fingered it, so he fled to his thoughts. Thought was his element. All else disturbed and made him conscious of his fatal gift; but, living in terms of thought, he knew peace. Alone with his shelf of books, and plaster casts, and piano, with the range of snow mountains in front of him that Higgs crossed into Erewhon, he began to think, to create his Promised Land, to say: Let there be this, let there be that! and when he looked upon what he had created he found it good.

What he needed for a foundation was some concrete idea that yet implied progress, prayers without a god to address them to and a crucifixion without a Christ to die, what awed him in Handel formulated in a sequence of ideas. "I want the Church," he wrote in a letter, "as much as I want Free Thought." Darwinism seemed to give him just this. It reduced life to an idea, one organism turning into another, and then into another, until it turned into him, as he would in due course turn into a Nice Person. The weakness of Darwinism from his point of view, though he did not yet see it, was that it set too great store by mere chance; and chance frightened him almost as much as Badcock or Isabella. Chance was raw, incalculable, not a pattern, and he yearned for a pattern; loved tidiness and security, and therefore assumed that life must be tidy and secure. A haphazard bringing about of variations did not really suit him. It was not the way he would have set about producing more complex organisms from simple ones, and therefore was not the way they were produced. In any case, it left out God; and though he wanted God left out in a sense, he also wanted Him included, as Macbeth murdered Banquo, and then had a chair put ready for him at his coronation feast, and made a speech regretting his absence and proposing his health.

As Butler himself later on set himself to show, the theory of evolution was much older than Darwin, but it became for the first time popular as put forward by Darwin because it met current needs. People like Butler pounced on it, hugged it to their bosom. They were utterly unsceptical, utterly romantic, and yet utterly irreligious;



and Darwinism provided them with a faith and an ideal—progress, and made nonsense of religion as they had been brought up to understand it; provided, as it were, a means of having a revolution without getting rid of kings and aristocrats and priests, or pulling down churches, or destroying the sanctity of the home or the marriage tie. Everything would go on as before—church bells ring on a Sunday, and servants touch their caps to their betters, and cheques be cashed; only, instead of all this being justified because it was God's will, or torn to pieces because it was abominable, it became glorified both as an enormous improvement on the animal kingdom, and as an earnest of what was ahead in the way of supermen. If Swift had happened to be interested in evolution, he would have written an essay arguing that all the evidence went to show, not that apes had evolved into men, but men into apes; if Johnson, he would have asked Boswell whether he fancied going to bed with a baboon; but Butler smacked his thighs and glorified the Lord.

He had doubted Article XV and baptismal regeneration, then had stopped saying his prayers, then, as he wrote from New Zealand to Philip Worsley, had come to "recant many religious opinions propounded by me to yourself. A wider circle of ideas has resulted from travel, and an entire uprooting of all past habits has been accompanied with a hardly less entire change of opinions upon many subjects. . . . My commonplace book is full of notes upon religious subjects, and in them I can trace the gradual change from my old narrow bigoted tenets to my far happier latitudinarianism. . . . From Gibbon, whom I

read very carefully on my voyage out and whom I continue constantly to snatch at, I fancy that I am imbibing a calm and philosophical spirit of impartial and critical investigation. Much as there is in Gibbon which we should alike condemn, for, however we may admire his sarcasms, it is impossible not at times to feel that he would have acted nobly in suppressing them—he is a grand historian and the impress of a mighty intellect is upon his work.”

Gibbon shocked him because he was a sceptic; on the other hand, he liked Gibbon because he pulled the Church to pieces, and with it Langar. What he wanted was an unsceptical Gibbon, who, as Jones said of Handel, would “walk through the absurdity of the words that were given him and seize upon and set to music the sentiment which he recognised as underlying them.” This *The Origin of Species* seemed to him to do. He read it soon after its publication in 1859, and “became one of Mr. Darwin’s many enthusiastic admirers.” Although he had said in a letter to his Cambridge friend Marriott: “You say people must have something to believe in; I can only say that I have not found my digestion impeded since I left off believing in what does not appear to be supported by sufficient evidence,” he was not, and, because of his nature, upbringing and the times in which he lived, could not be, content with a negative attitude to life. What delight when he came upon Darwinism and realised its implications! So drastic and yet so safe! so sublime and yet so factual! Gibbon without his blasphemies, the Kingdom of Heaven without having to offend the Nice People, truth in Towneley’s instead of Badcock’s or his own

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likeness, a justification of what was and a guarantee of its infinite improvement without any sudden break, as though God had come forward to guarantee all gilt-edged securities for eternity.

Now his lonely farmstead overflowed with music, now his fingers as he played Handel gained new confidence and vigour, now he saw before him an illimitable prospect of progress. All the universe became radiant, comprehensible, whereas before it had been murky and frightening. The colours of flowers no longer terrified, no longer reminded him of Badcock's frenzied eye; deep forests and shining glaciers left him as quiet as geometrical figures; the very sun's warmth no longer stirred up his body as heat a stew, but soothed, because he understood. All was quiet, peaceful. He would dare even to meet a Nice Person face to face, because he understood. Cruelty no longer made him swoon and sicken, inequality and injustice no longer twinged his conscience; all fitted into place, all was apt and necessary, even to the extent that "the first thing which a new form does is to exterminate its predecessor; the old form knows this, and will therefore do its best to prevent the new form arising"—so that Butler's longing for his father to die and leave him his money was quite in order, as also his father's desire to frustrate his purposes.

In his first published writing on evolution, a dialogue published in the *Christchurch Press*, he begins by dealing with the objection that Darwinism is "cold and hard," that it is "all head" and has "no heart at all." "A man of science," he argues, "may be a man of other things besides science . . . when he has once

come to a conclusion he may be hearty enough in support of it, and in his other capacities may be of as warm a temperament as ever you can desire." He then goes on to explain what evolution means; "the great agent in this development of life has been competition. This has culled species after species, and secured that those alone should survive which were best fitted for the conditions by which they found themselves surrounded. Endeavour to take a bird's-eye view of the whole matter. See battle after battle, first in one part of the world, then in another, sometimes raging more fiercely and sometimes less; even as in human affairs war has always existed in some part of the world from the earliest known periods, and probably always will exist. While a species is conquering in one part of the world it is being subdued in another, and while its conquerors are indulging in their triumph, down comes the fiat for their being culled and drafted out, some to life and some to death, and so forth *ad infinitum*." His imaginary interlocutor remarks that it is all "very horrid" and "utterly subversive of Christianity." As to its being horrid, Butler cheerfully agrees; as to the second objection—"my dear friend," he says, "I believe in Christianity and I believe in Darwin."

Darwin was so taken with this dialogue that he sent it to a London newspaper accompanied by a note: "This Dialogue, written by someone quite unknown to Dr. Darwin, is remarkable from its spirit and from giving so clear and accurate a view of Dr. D.'s theory. It is also remarkable from being published in a Colony exactly 12 years old, in which it might have been

thought only material interests would have been regarded." Butler followed up the dialogue with a letter headed "Darwin Among the Machines," and signed "Cellarius," that deals with a subject to which he often returned. Machines, he argues, are really new species coming into existence, which are now servants of mankind, but are likely in the end to master them. In another letter, headed "Lucubratia Ebria," he confutes his own case, arguing that machines are extra limbs, which have got themselves grown because they were needed. This line of thought led him to the congenial conclusion that the respect in which rich men are held by poor is legitimate, since riches imply a "superior organisation." Thus this respect "springs from some of the very highest impulses of our nature" and is "the same sort of affectionate reverence which a dog feels for man." He also carried on a correspondence in the *Press*, under different pseudonyms, with a Bishop who had suggested that Darwinism was a good example of the fact that human invention is limited, like a barrel-organ, to a specific number of tunes. The Bishop, to prove his point, brought forward the names of Dr. Erasmus Darwin and Buffon as having hit on evolution in their day. Though Butler refused to accept the Bishop's contention at the time, and staunchly upheld Darwin's claim to have originated the theory, it was his first introduction to a controversy to which later on he devoted a great deal of energy, though whether more out of zeal to champion Buffon, Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck or to blackguard Darwin, it is difficult to say.

In a letter to Darwin some years later about

this correspondence, he wrote that he "assumed another character because my dialogue was, in my hearing, very severely criticised by two or three whose opinion I thought worth having, and I deferred to their judgment in my next." He also apologised for not having gone more heavily on the side of *The Origin of Species*, because he thought that "having said my say as well as I could, I had better take a less impassioned tone," and expressed a fear that Darwin might be shocked by his appeal to such periodicals as *Once a Week* and *Macmillan's Magazine*, but "we used to get a good deal of superficial knowledge out of them."

By the grace of Darwin, Butler was now able to venture from baptismal regeneration and the Articles to such formerly terrifying questions as Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Coolly, reasonably, he considered. Others had been led astray by prejudice and visions, had had dust thrown into their eyes by self-interested charlatans, had been pathetically gullible. All that was over since Darwin. Since Darwin all sensible men looked facts in the face and refused to be bamboozled. He looked the Resurrection in the face, focused it—of course, Christ did not die upon the Cross, but swooned, rose, not from the dead, but from a swoon, so that the whole edifice of Christianity had been based on a bogus miracle. How clear it was! He meticulously compared the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion, came to the conclusion that this was the only interpretation to which they lent themselves; and when he got back to England he published at his own expense the results of his investigations



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in a pamphlet entitled *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as given by the Four Evangelists Critically Examined*.

Rubbing his hands, he saw that he need never be bored (boredom, his particular dread, became his doom), since there were any number of questions like the Resurrection to be investigated. He had not formulated them yet, but they were whistling round him like a restless wind—pictures of uncertain subjects by uncertain painters, reputations to be made, re-made, or un-made, sites to be identified, the authorship of the Odyssey, the Sonnets, notes—how many notes!—to be jotted down. It was like a scientist who suddenly found himself in possession of a microscope, and realised its possibilities; how it would reveal secrets, glorifying what had become familiar, and filling up innumerable empty hours.

There remained the question of conduct. Even here was relief, for now he could reconcile himself to a virtuous and respectable way of life. He would be pure, not because he was a coward, not because his appetites terrified him, not because even at the Antipodes he was afraid of his father's hand lifted against him and his mother's face moving tearfully close to his, but because virtue was sensible and necessary for correct focusing. The microscope's lens must not be misted over, even though the eye that peered down it might be as hearty as any other. Edward Chudleigh, a schoolboy who went to New Zealand two years after Butler, and who met him there, recorded in his diary that Butler was "at present nearly if not quite an infidel, and yet I believe he would not do a dishonourable thing to save his life." "My dear boy," Butler



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said to Chudleigh on one occasion, "you are quite right to maintain your own opinions, but you cannot blame me for doing as I do, holding such opinions. I shall not do it because I do not think it right, I do right because I think it wrong to do otherwise." Chudleigh's diary does not explain what it was that Butler refused so emphatically to do. It merely records that it was something they had been talking about.

Darwinism's greatest emotional appeal to Butler, and to many of his contemporaries, lay in the promise it implied of the coming, not of a Messiah, but of a generation of Messiahs. "Give the world time," Butler said in one of his conversations with Chudleigh, "an infinite number of epochs, and according to its past and present system, like the coming tide each epoch will advance on each, but so slowly that it can hardly be traced, man's body becoming finer to bear his finer mind, till man becomes not only an angel but an archangel." In New Zealand he met one of these archangels whose body had become finer to bear his finer mind, an authentic Nice Person. He met Pauli, and loved him humbly, passionately, for better and for worse, until death did them part. An account that he has left of his intimacy with Pauli is quite different from anything else he wrote. His pattern for living got laid aside for once; and he came out into the open, was forced into the open because of the intensity of his feelings. They made it impossible for him to keep up the pretence that turning over books and ideas completely satisfied. He had to admit his life's inadequacy in face of Pauli, and what he felt for him. Life intruded itself on him in the person of Pauli, and the agony

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of this intrusion tore him to pieces. He paid Pauli an allowance, and still it tore him to pieces. He worked harder and harder, but there was no relief for him. He crouched inside his self-portrait, yet remained vulnerable. It was his solitary passion, the only direct, real experience he ever had. Butler wrote the account of his friendship with Pauli in May, 1899, a few months after Pauli's death and a few years before his own. It reveals depths of suffering and humiliation and self-deception which are particularly tragic in his case because he went to such lengths to guard himself against anything of the sort. The impression it creates is of a damned soul, of someone utterly forlorn and bewildered and alone. He wrote the account in Italy as "I could never tear myself from the other work I have in hand while at home and able to get to the Museum."

Pauli and Butler met in Christchurch in connection with the *Press*, on whose staff Pauli was employed, in 1863, when Butler was twenty-seven and Pauli twenty-five. Butler scarcely noticed him at their first meeting; Pauli was too far above him, too well-dressed and self-confident and popular. Then, to his astonishment, Pauli came to see him, and they sat talking far into the night. Butler talked and talked, looking anxiously for signs of boredom and impatience in Pauli's face, but without finding any. He was enchanted. Dared he hope that so exquisite a creature found his company tolerable? It seemed inconceivable. Dared he aspire to be loved by such a one as Pauli? "He had been at Winchester under Dr. Moberley. I have a high opinion of Winchester now, but I had a higher then. He had taken his degree at Oxford, and

we Johnnians looked on Oxford as being a good deal above ourselves, at any rate in outward appearance and address. I knew myself utterly unable to get a suit of clothes that would fit me. Redfarm and Barnam's clothes never fitted me at Cambridge, much less did those made for me by Mr. Hobbs at Christchurch; while on my run I generally wore slop clothes ready-made. Pauli's clothes must have cost at least twice as much as mine did. Everything that he had was very good, and he was such a fine handsome fellow with such an attractive manner that to me he seemed everything I should like myself to be and knew I was not. I knew myself to be plebeian in appearance, and believed myself to be more plebeian in taste than I probably in reality was; at least I knew I was far from being what I should wish myself, either in body or mind."

Pauli embodied everything Butler revered. He was a Nice Person; knowledge came to him without poring over books; when he walked out in the evening he knew both what he wanted and how to get it, and spent three times as much on his clothes as Butler did. After their first meeting Butler "was aware that I had become suddenly intimate with a personality quite different from that of anyone I had ever known." He prostrated himself before Pauli. What did it matter that he was indifferent to Handel? that such intellectual interests as he had made no appeal to Butler? His easy perfection compensated for everything; "the handsomest man God ever sent into San Francisco, so help me God you are," as a San Francisco barman said once to Pauli, and as Butler never tired of repeating, thereby fortifying himself with the

San Francisco barman's opinion, and, at the same time, letting Jones and Mr. Cathie and Miss Savage and Madame know that, after all, they were small fry to one who, if at a price, was intimate with the handsomest man God ever sent into San Francisco.

Butler saw Pauli a lot after their first long talk together. Human relationships were always difficult for him. He had been so knocked about by his father, so hurt by his mother, that he took it for granted that he would be knocked about and hurt by everyone. It never occurred to him that affection as such sufficed. It had to be bolstered up, subsidised. He could not expect to have his affection for the handsomest man God ever sent into San Francisco reciprocated. If only Pauli were weak, or in need of money, then there might be a chance for him. He looked for some crack in Pauli's defences to fasten on to, thereby making himself indispensable, and found it when one day Pauli "showed me his tongue, and the skin was broken all over it. I supposed the mischief was syphilitic." Henceforth he knew that, "though he seemed so well and handsome, he was really very ill." Not only was Pauli sick, he was poor as well. "He had no money—nothing, in fact, beyond a reversion of £4,000 or £5,000 on the death of his father. I believed myself worth not less than £800 a year. What could be simpler for me than to say that I would lend him £100 to take him home, and say £200 a year for three years till he could get cured and go out to New Zealand again? He was to repay me when he came into his reversion, and if more was wanted his father and mother might be relied upon to do it."



This £800 a year was the interest at ten per cent., at that time obtainable in New Zealand, on the £8,000 which, as a result of industry and good luck in the matter of prices, the £4,400 he had had from his father had become. Even before he met Pauli, he had decided to sell out and go back to England, because he suspected, and, as it turned out, with reason, that prices would fall; in any case, "the life was utterly uncongenial to me." It took him seven or eight months to make arrangements for leaving New Zealand, and during this time he was constantly in Pauli's company, "I being devoted to him much as a dog to its master."

Butler had every reason to be pleased with himself. He had succeeded in between four and five years in almost doubling the money given him by his father, "though it reached me piecemeal, and some of it not till the end of the time I was in New Zealand"; he had a Nice Person for intimate friend and was free to return to London and study painting as he had always wanted to, and, he hoped, without having to be dependent on Langar. Paying for Pauli was still a delight. It was still the honeymoon of their love. Only later, when paying had become a routine, did it seem irksome.

"In those days," he writes, "I knew very little of the world, and Pauli impressed me as especially strong precisely in those respects wherein I felt most deficient. I do not suppose that Pauli, after all, knew much more than I did, but so little did I know, that a confident manner and a good address were readily taken for gospel by me. Perhaps the secret of it all lay in the fact of my knowing well that I had not passed by

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the ambush of young days scathless, whereas I could see (and I imagine truly) that to Pauli there had been no ambush of young days at all. The main desire of my life was to conceal how severely I had been wounded, and to get beyond the reach of those arrows that from time to time still racked me. When, therefore, Pauli seemed attracted towards me and held out the right hand of fellowship, I caught at it, not only because I liked him, but because I believed that the mere fact of being his friend would buoy me up in passing through waters that to me were still deep and troubled, and which to him I felt sure were shallow and smooth as glass."

Jones considers their friendship "one of those one-sided friendships, sometimes met with in real life, as well as in books, where the diffident, poetical, shy man becomes devoted to the confident, showy, worldly man as a dog to his master." It was more that Butler clung to Pauli to hearten himself, like an old invalid lady leaning on the arm of a robust chauffeur, or patting the flank of a vigorous dog. Pauli's function was to keep before his eyes tangible evidence of there being higher forms of life than his own. As long as Pauli was content to lunch with him now and again he could never quite despair of himself. He still had a link with Nice People and their world despite his own deep taint of Langar. By being one of Pauli's nearer hangers-on he felt that he continued to be one of the nearer hangers-on of the best set of his time.

The happy couple sailed for England in June, 1864. If Pauli had stayed in New Zealand,



Butler believed, he would probably have died, and certainly have married Amy Fitzgerald, daughter of the editor of the *Press*. From both disasters he saved him. How different was the voyage home from the voyage out! No organising a choir now, no finding doing so convenient because it provided a means of getting to know the poorer passengers, no Gibbon even. Pauli was ill with his mouth and throat, and Butler devotedly nursed him.

They reached London in August, and Pauli found rooms for them both in Clifford's Inn. Butler never moved from these rooms, but Pauli did, in less than a year, on the plea that he needed a more airy situation. "I am afraid," Butler writes, "that he left simply in order to get away from me." He accepted this fact even at the time; and yet he still could not give up Pauli, still insisted on the minimum rights that what he paid entitled him to. "All this time, however, I had felt—from the very beginning—that my intimacy with Pauli was only superficial, and I also perceived more and more that I bored him. I have not the least doubt that I did so, and am afraid he is not the only one of my friends who has had to put up with much from me on the same score. He cared little for literature, and nothing for philosophy, music, or the arts. I studied art, and he law. Law interested him, whereas it was nothing to me. He liked society, and I hated it; moreover, he was at times very irritable, and would find continual fault with me, often I have no doubt justly, but often, as it seemed to me, unreasonably. Devoted to him as I continued to be for many years, those years were very unhappy as



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well as very happy ones. I set down a good deal to his ill-health, no doubt truly; a great deal more, I was sure, was my own fault—and I say so still. I excused much on the score of his poverty and his dependence on myself, for his father and mother, when it came to the point, could do nothing for him. I was his host, and was bound to forbear on that ground if on no other. I always hoped that as time went on and he saw how absolutely devoted to him I was, what unbounded confidence I had in him, and how I forgave him over and over again for treatment that I should not have stood for a moment from anyone else—I always hoped that he would soften, and deal as frankly and as unreservedly with me as I with him, but though for fifteen years I hoped this, in the end I gave it up and settled down into a resolve from which I never departed—to do all I could for him, avoid friction of any kind, and make the best of things for him and myself that circumstances would allow.”

Butler paid Pauli his allowance regularly, and in due course Pauli was called to the Bar. He did not tell his father how much he was paying out for his friend, only admitted to helping him occasionally. When Pauli was called, Fitzgerald pressed him to return to New Zealand. Butler thought he ought to go, and told him so; then, “to my unbounded surprise, he burst into tears—a thing I had never seen him do, though I had done it often enough myself. That, from him, at that time, was enough to settle the matter.” Butler rushed forward, weeping himself, begged Pauli to stay in London, said that London would be desolate without him, attempted clumsily,

shyly, to comfort him. Pauli dried his eyes, the crisis over, a little, unpleasant-looking man with luxuriant side-whiskers, a dandy, but rather common, the sort of man who nowadays would probably do well as a salesman of some sort, or a journalist, or a writer of travel books. Though then there were not so many openings for his sort of talent, he managed to do fairly well, what with Butler's allowance, and allowances from other bachelors with independent means, and the nine hundred or so a year he earned at the Bar.

After Pauli had moved away from Clifford's Inn he came to lunch with Butler every day when he was in town, staying not more than three-quarters of an hour, at most an hour. What did they talk about as they ate together? Did they even talk at all? With Jones Butler talked incessantly, relentlessly going over the same subject again and again; with Pauli he was more timid, reluctant to jeopardise the last remaining fragments of his love. He looked across at Pauli—"the handsomest man ever sent into San Francisco, so help me God you are!" It was a Captain Buckley, V.C., who told him that the San Francisco barman had made this remark, which somehow set a stamp of authenticity on it, made it all the more convincing, and so the more comforting. He looked across admiringly at the handsomest man God ever sent into San Francisco, proud to be lunching with him, eagerly listening to anecdotes about his fashionable friends, sometimes being shown their photographs and humbly looking at them, if it was the end of the month making his contribution—a cheque—which Pauli casually pocketed. Sometimes they even went away together, "but I

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always felt that he was bored and anxious to get away." In the autumn of 1866 they went to Dieppe for a month, "and at the end of it he said to me that though he believed I had been pretty happy he had never been so miserable in his life. After that . . . we never, to the best of my recollection, went out with one another again, nor to any theatre nor to any place of amusement whatsoever."

Butler did not know where Pauli lived. He might have found out if he had cared to, but did not care to. "He kept his goings out and his comings in to himself as far as he could possibly do so." When, after the publication of *Erewhon*, Butler enjoyed a temporary fame, Pauli actually introduced him to one or two of his swell friends instead of just showing him their photographs; but this soon passed. "Year by year, the more I did for him the more he kept me at arm's length, and for the last fifteen years or so I did not know where he lived—till I heard it on the day of his funeral. Of course I could have pressed him and insisted on knowing, or I could have found out in twenty ways if I had set about it; but I knew he did not wish it, and so utterly devoted was I to him that I never questioned him, and when he was ill, and I had to see his clerk, I never asked where he lived."

Pauli's life must have been a curious one. He had not only Butler to visit, but several others with whom he was on similar terms, all of whom made him an allowance. One Butler refers to as a man who had been blackmailed for many years; "the porter at the club had once spoken to Pauli seriously, as being known to be an intimate friend of X's, and had told him that

men of suspicious character had come there asking for X and had hung about waiting for him on being told to go away." Pauli had somehow to give Butler, Mr. X and his other patrons sufficient encouragement for them to be prepared to continue the allowances they made him; he had his legal practice—for instance, he "settled the whole contract for the bringing of Cleopatra's Needle, and in spite of the many accidents that befell the obelisk, Sir Erasmus Wilson found himself always on the safe side"—he lived the life of a fashionable man about town, and there was his mistress waiting for him when he got home at night. A man of far more robust health would have broken down under the strain; and it is not surprising that Pauli should at last have succumbed. Butler tries to reproduce his charm, but without any great success, describing how, when once Pauli met a man in the street who asked him to dinner, and explained that only his wife would be present, going on to add: "of course, she's not really my wife," he replied, with great *sang-froid*: "No, no, naturally," and how he so pitied animals that when he saw a stray cat he would ring the bell of any house near-by in the hope that the cat would be taken in. Yet the charm does not get across. Towneley, whose characterisation is based on Pauli, is so unlike the original that, despite the Miss Snow episode, a clergyman, a certain Canon M'Corrick, who was Butler's contemporary at John's, and rowed in the boat that he coxed, claimed to be his original: "Of course I am Towneley," Jones reports the Canon as saying, "and he says a great many very kind things about me." According to Mr. Cathie, Pauli was shockingly

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mean, and the only positive virtue Butler ascribes to him, apart from professional skill and *savoir-faire*, is that "I never saw the slightest sign of snobbishness in him; I never heard him speak in a manner unworthy of a gentleman." This, in view of his own account of Pauli's conduct and manner of life, gives some idea of what, in Butler's eyes, constituted snobbishness and being a gentleman.

Pauli's charm in the eyes of Butler and the others who were good enough to supplement his income was unquestionably physical. His physical presence stirred them and made them make out cheques in his favour. The attitude that he hoped people would have towards distressed cats when he rang the bell of a house to draw attention to one being in the neighbourhood, they had towards him, and he managed his complicated system of parasitism so efficiently that it is impossible not to agree with Butler that, his handling of Cleopatra's Needle apart, he had a good deal of practical ability. None of his patrons knew of the other's existence, nor presumably did his mistress know of theirs. He went round from one to the other, lunching here, having tea there, collecting cheques from all of them as they fell due, then, I like to think, going home to his mistress for a little well-earned relaxation. Jones he would have nothing to do with, resenting him in the same way that professional beggars and confidence tricksters resent the unprofessional rival who takes the cream of a neighbourhood's gullibility, not for himself, but for some charity or missionary society.

In 1869 Butler called in his money from New Zealand; "all this," he writes of the transaction,

"is a story that haunts me and will haunt me to my dying day, for it was my great friend, W. S. Moorhouse, who was my mortgagee, one of the very finest and best men it has ever been my lot to cross, a man who had shown me infinite kindness and whom I can never think of without remorse. . . . It makes me sick to think of it. Bit by bit I called in my money." Jones finds this penitence excessive. After all, he argues, the security was good, and Moorhouse presumably had no difficulty in arranging for the mortgage to be transferred; and he wonders whether there was any other explanation of Butler's acute sense of having wronged a friend. Why should there be any other explanation? To Butler, getting money out of anyone except his father was to do an irreparable injury. It was like robbing a woman of her beauty or a violinist of his right hand. He prayed to be forgiven for calling in his money from New Zealand "as from the bottom of my heart I forgive Pauli for whose sake I did it. However, let it pass—it makes me sick to think of it."

Pauli made Butler suffer. This exquisite creature with a blistered, swollen tongue, and a need for two hundred a year, whom waiters and prostitutes treated deferentially, always at ease—"No, no, naturally," as Towneley's—"I've come before my time; What! you here, Pontifex. Well, upon my word"—who was on friendly terms with really important, distinguished persons, even got invited to a country house to meet the Lord Chancellor, and paid three times as much as Butler (with Butler's money) for his clothes; this culmination of a process of creative evolution proved elusive, slipped from his grasp.



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Not even money was strong enough really to hold him; not even disease weakened Pauli sufficiently for Butler to be able to bind him to him. Ernest gives up Towneley for Truth's sake, although, since he was to come into a fortune and bona fide intended to get married, Towneley would gladly have cultivated him; with Butler and Pauli it was the other way about. Pauli was always in retreat and Butler pursuing. Butler was frightened of him, dared not offend by asking awkward questions, humbly submitted to his criticism and irritability. If he plucked up courage to suggest that Pauli might perhaps give him some idea of how much he earned, and how long the two hundred a year he received from him would be necessary, there was a flood of tears, or else an outburst of fury and contempt. Then Butler capitulated, asked no more questions, thankfully accepted the crumbs of friendship that Pauli condescendingly offered. In his account of their intimacy he says, and so pathetically, that he thinks Pauli kept out of his way because he was afraid of him; "not that he liked me—it is plain he never did so—but he respected me and feared me." It is like a mild husband reeling home after a debauch, and heartening himself to face the storm ahead by imagining his wife waiting for him, terrified in case he should be violent. Butler's life was a tragedy of fear—fear implanted in him by his parents, nourished by them, waxing great as he grew older. Fear of poverty, disease, love, responsibility, of life itself, of being, buffeted him continually. He never escaped from fear. His genius acted like an acid on it, bubbling, giving off venomous fumes; yet to the end he remained afraid.



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Where Butler's writing was concerned, Pauli was his "most freezing critic," allowed him occasionally to read him passages, sat listening, not, like Jones, anxious for him to finish so that he might express rapturous approval, but frigidly, critically. In his criticism he took Langar into account, having, after all, a stake in Butler's expectations, and always suggested the deletion of whatever was likely to infuriate Canon Butler. Butler, protesting to Miss Savage and Jones to the contrary, took his advice. He cut out, for instance, at Pauli's suggestion, the passage in *Erewhon* about "the trial of a young man for having been so inexperienced as to part with a valuable property to his guardian for an insufficient sum without independent advice." According to Jones, "Pauli made him cut this out as being likely to be taken for an allusion to the sale of the Whitehall, which of course it was; and Pauli, as a man of the world, saw no advantage in irritating Canon Butler unnecessarily." In the revised edition of 1901, when, his father being dead, he had no reason to consider him, he put it back.

The Whitehall estate, by the terms of his grandfather's will, came to him on the death of his father and an aunt. He was persuaded in 1857 to agree to the sale of part of the property on, from his point of view, disadvantageous terms, without in return getting the entail cut off and the reversion made absolute. When, later on, he tried to raise money on the property, and found that he could not as long as his reversion was contingent, he realised that he had been wronged. "How they bamboozled me!" he noted on one of the letters dealing with the

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transaction. Six months after his father's death, and thirty years after he had agreed to the sale of part of the property, looking through a tin box of Canon Butler's papers he came upon the valuation prepared at the time of the sale; "I pounced upon it, copied it, and returned it to my cousin with a note saying what I had done." Then he proceeded to write a long note called "Fathers and Sons," in which he suggests that the fact of his having a "modest competency" coming to him "prevented my father from putting out all his strength against me." He also suggests that it was "jealousy of my having a voice in the matter at all" which induced Canon Butler to trick him into forgoing some of his rights in connection with the Whitehall property in 1857.

From about 1870 onwards Butler began to lose money. The effect on him was paralysing. He "infringed on capital"; he and Pauli "ate, ate, ate down on to the bone"; the companies in which, on the advice of his friend Henry Hoare, head of Hoare's Bank, he invested, failed one after the other. Butler became a director of one of them, the Canada Tanning Extract Company, and in May, 1874, he went to Canada to report upon its situation. In Canada he learnt how to keep accounts by double entry, and that Pauli "had no backbone."

By 1874 Butler had become a highbrow. He retained his respectful admiration for Nice People, for common sense, for the average in thought and values, but he had personally become a highbrow. In New Zealand he had still been prepared to talk about the educative value of a practical life such as sheep-farming,

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and to imply that his fellow sheep-farmers were just as enlivening company as his fellow-undergraduates at Cambridge; in Canada he was frankly contemptuous of the philistinism of the population, and expressed his contempt in a poem, "A Psalm of Montreal," in which he described his feelings when a custodian in the Montreal Museum of Natural History told him that plaster casts of the Antinous and the Discobulus were hidden away because they were "rather vulgar."

Butler was not successful in salving the Canada Tanning Extract Company, and found himself back in London in 1875 with only £2,000 left out of his original £8,000. "This Pauli and I set ourselves to eat up bit by bit." Pauli's ascendancy over him, his "faith in him as a superior being, as one who was in all respects stronger and better than I was, was at an end," Butler wrote, ". . . I had found out that I was the stronger man of the two. . . . But I do not think my affection for Pauli was any less than it was in 1863. I had been with him so long, and when he chose to make himself agreeable he had a charm of manner which, were he still living . . . would draw me to him much as I was drawn to him in the first instance. Besides, I had given him my word not to fail him; I believed him to be utterly ruined if I did not keep it, and I fully hoped, year after year, that he would ease me off."

The four years after his return from Canada were a nightmare to Butler. He was living on capital; Pauli would tell him nothing of his financial position, and when pressed to do so burst

into a fit of passionate weeping; neither his books nor his pictures were saleable. They lunched together now only three times a week, from 1.20 to 2 or 2.10, and this was all they saw of one another. Butler shared—more than shared—his last penny with him; and all the while, Pauli, unbeknown to Butler, was earning round about £900 a year at the Bar, apart from his other subsidies. He had got used to the idea of being pensioned by Butler; a temporary arrangement had hardened into a right, and Pauli was no more inclined to spare Butler because of his financial difficulties than a baby at the breast is inclined to spare its mother when she finds suckling it painful. On Butler's side there was surprisingly little bitterness. All he did was plead with Pauli every now and again to be franker with him, and then, when he saw tears coming, retract. He was "oppressed at all times with a sense of the utter iniquity of the treatment I was receiving"; he says that if in his writing at this time "there is something which the reader can feel but not grasp . . . it is due, I believe, to the sense of wrong which was omnipresent with me, both in regard to Pauli, the Darwins and my father, and also to my ever-present anxiety as regards money"; at the same time, in 1877, the worst year of all, he dedicated *Life and Habit* to "Charles Paine Pauli, Esq., Barrister-at-Law, in acknowledgment of his invaluable criticism of the proof-sheets of this and my previous books and in recognition of an old and well-tried friendship."

By 1879 there was no money left. Butler could not borrow on the security of his reversion to the Whitehall estate, could not sell any of his books or pictures, could not recover from Pauli any of

what he had advanced to him. Only one possibility remained. It was inevitable. It had been inevitable from the beginning. He must approach his father. In November, 1876, he had written to Canon Butler: "As regards your other question, namely what I have lost in the Canada Extract Tanning Co., I have lost £3,600; but your question suggests that you might be intending to make some proposal to me which might do something towards making it up to me, and this I should wish to say frankly I could not allow." Eighteen months later he was negotiating with his father the terms on which he would consent to make him an allowance of £300 a year. It was an exact repetition of what happened when he made up his mind not to take Orders in May, 1854.

In what state of mind did Butler pick up his pen to write to Canon Butler about how he and Pauli together had "eaten and eaten and eaten down to the bone"! What thoughts came to him as he once more delivered himself into the hands of his enemy! He was forty-four, and at one stroke had to undo all that he had achieved in the way of extricating himself from Langar since he sailed down the Thames on his way to New Zealand and stopped saying his prayers. The most terrible thing must have been the sense of doom. As Moorhouse haunted him because he had called in his money, as Miss Savage haunted him because he could not bring himself to seduce her, as Pauli would have haunted him if he had refused him money as long as he had any at all, so his father haunted him. His father was a shadow over his life. Every day, and every hour of every day, he was considering what he

did and felt and said in relation to him. Now he had to return, an unwilling prodigal. Nothing but money could have fetched him back, no emotional appeal, no appeal to his pity or sense of duty or childhood memories; only money.

Canon Butler made conditions. He would give Butler an allowance of £300 a year, but there was to be no more subsidising of Pauli, about whose financial position he had made enquiries, learning—though Butler did not believe him—that he was earning a comfortable income. Anything Butler earned was to be deducted from his allowance; and, since he had shown himself so incapable a manager of money, he was only to inherit a life interest in whatever land Canon Butler might bequeath him. The conditions were reasonable enough. Butler had already had an expensive education and something like £5,000 in cash. He had lost the £5,000, and, despite the expensive education, appeared to be quite incapable of earning a living. Canon Butler, it is true, could well afford to make his son an allowance; but from his point of view doing so meant making it possible for Butler to write what were, in his opinion, blasphemous books. There was also a strong supposition that part of what he paid would go to subsidise what he considered to be a disreputable friendship. He would be strengthened in this supposition by virtue of the fact that Butler had already lied to him several times regarding the amount of money he gave Pauli. As for removing the entail on the Whitehall property, which was what Butler wanted—he was naturally reluctant to do anything of the sort in view of what had happened to the other capital



sum he had put at his son's disposition. Even Jones admits that his insistence on the entail's remaining was a good thing in the end, since if Butler had been able to raise money on the Whitehall property he would unquestionably have done so, and invested the proceeds in Hoare's companies.

In any case, Canon Butler's original refusal to remove the entail was amply justified when, on his reluctantly consenting to do so, Butler proceeded, again with Pauli's help, to "eat and eat and eat down on to the bone," and in six years time again found himself penniless, having run through another £5,000. From this last financial crisis he was relieved by the death of his father, which took place, to Butler's "unutterable thankfulness," on November 29, 1886. Except for a short period in 1890 when, for some unexplained reason, Butler was again "living seriously beyond my means," economic peace reigned after this till the end of his life.

When Butler told Pauli the terms on which alone his father would consent to make him an allowance, he "behaved quite well . . . accepted the situation with the same absence of effusion that he had maintained hitherto. As he had hardly ever said a word of thanks, and as, to do him justice, he had never directly asked me for money, or directly said that he would make shipwreck if he did not get it, so he made no complaint nor showed any desire to reproach me when it was forthcoming no longer." All that happened was that Pauli's coat got shabby, and his cough more noticeable. Otherwise their lunches together three times a week were just the same. In this Pauli compares favourably



with Jones, who neglected Butler as soon as he ceased to be financially dependent on him. The coat getting shabby hurt Butler. Pauli's clothes were so much a part of his charm that for them to suffer was like a prostitute beginning to have wrinkles and grey hair. He suffered agonies of self-reproach to think that through him—no, through his father, and it was one more grievance against his father—Pauli was condemned to put up with shiny elbows and frayed sleeves, like himself, or any Jones or Miss Savage.

This went on for eighteen months. It surprised Butler that there was no collapse. He had always believed Pauli to be totally dependent on him; and now, when his support was withdrawn, despite the shabby coat, Pauli managed to keep out of the workhouse. Henceforth, his belief in Pauli's utter dependence on him was a fiction. He knew in his heart that the money he gave Pauli was not necessary. Mr. Cathie once saw Pauli come immaculately dressed out of an expensive club and get into a waiting cab, and he mentioned the fact to Butler, who brushed it aside, saying that probably Pauli had been lunching with a friend. Why did he go on paying, why ruin himself twice for Pauli's sake, when he knew that it was only to provide a little extra pocket-money for a fashionable man-about-town? His account of their intimacy is full of "I was his host," "He was my guest," "I had given him my word not to fail him," "I did what I did simply out of pity"; but it is not very convincing, especially when he lets slip that he "was confident that Pauli had other friends as well as myself, and felt pretty sure that so long as he had two hundred pounds a year

certain from me, he would, one way or another, make up what would be enough to keep him comfortably."

It might have been blackmail; or it might have been, not exactly blackmail, but a feeling that he had so exposed his vulnerability to Pauli that it was safer, as long as the price was not too high, to keep on friendly terms with him. The possibility of Pauli having some hold over him is supported by the fact that, although Butler was such an inveterate keeper of letters, he kept scarcely any of his to Pauli, and returned to Pauli, at his request, all his letters to him, and that he betrayed a certain nervousness when, after his death, Pauli's papers were being examined. A more plausible explanation is that, though he knew how little Pauli cared for him, he was determined that "nothing but death should end relations between us," and so went on paying as the only means of preventing Pauli from quite breaking with him. "Anything worthy of the name of friendship between me and Pauli," he writes, "was not to be. . . . I could see it was an effort to him to be in my company at all, and knew perfectly well that the whole thing was a sham—on my part an endeavour to deny that my passionate devotion to him for so many years in times gone by was spent in force, and on his to satisfy himself that the intimacy between us was still so close as to warrant his taking money from me." If Pauli had not taken money there would have been no intimacy at all. It amounted to no more than the payment of sixteen pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence each month, and hurried lunches between one visit to the British Museum and

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another; on Butler's side a sense of boring, on Pauli's of being bored. How relieved both of them were when the poor little ceremony was over, and they could part, Pauli with his sixteen pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence in his pocket, Butler to return to the British Museum! Yet meagre and strained as this intimacy was, Butler could not bear to give it up. Though his passion for Pauli was spent, he still paced anxiously up and down his room waiting for him to come, still suffered agonies of fear and regret if he was late or, for some reason, did not turn up; still no one stirred him as Pauli did. He wore Hans Faesch's hair on his watch-chain, saw Jones constantly, was "prouder of having received and treasured" the little notes Mr. Cathie sent him from time to time than of "all my books put together," felt it was safe to see Isabella and show her to Jones, poured out sentimental regrets about Miss Savage; but Pauli remained his single passion, his only link with those forces which—a phrase he is fond of—make men "kiss the earth."

As soon as Butler's reversion to the Whitehall estate was made absolute, he borrowed £5,000 on it. Soon after this, Canon Butler wrote him "a very bitter letter." Feeling safe with his £5,000, Butler went to Shrewsbury, where his father had now retired, and told him that he would have no more allowance, "'and,' I added quietly, 'no more such letters from you as you have now sent me.'" Here is the original of Ernest's stupendous revenge in *The Way of All Flesh*, when he goes down to Battersby, "got up regardless of expense," and, because he is

rich, with "an air of *insouciance* and good humour upon his face . . . which would have made a much plainer man good-looking," and makes his father "blush scarlet by putting out his hand and telling him laughingly that he possessed £80,000." In comparison with this heroic episode the original was lame, especially in its conclusion: "With that I left the house, but not seeing any reason why I should break with my father entirely, I either wrote or called again, I forget which, to soften the effect of what I had said."

After his father's death Butler had the "inexpressible happiness" to pay off the money he had borrowed on the security of the Whitehall estate. All was now easy. The only anxiety he had was lest Pauli should have married, so that he might find a "family sprung upon me after he was gone." In view of his father's irritating longevity, he was sceptical about Pauli's cough, and made "ample provision" for him in his will. All the same, "Pauli had death written on his face long before he died." Matters went on "quite pleasantly during the autumn and early winter of 1897." Pauli was beginning to suspect that despite the boredom of his company Butler might become a famous writer. *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, for instance, seemed to him to have the makings of a best-seller, and he was "more hurt and angry" than even Butler himself about its disappointing reception. In December, 1897, Butler got a note to say that Pauli was ill with bronchitis. Then he was too ill to write himself, and got his mistress to write to Butler that "the kindest thing is to disturb me as little as possible," and that "the other

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matter " can stand over. "The other matter," it need scarcely be said, was an offer from Butler to let him have a cheque for twenty-five pounds if he was in need of money.

Pauli was tired. Poor old Pauli—he was so tired that he did not even want a cheque. Butler should have known that that really was the end, that there snapped the only remaining link between them. To refuse a cheque! Pauli wanted for nothing. Other patrons provided in kind when Butler offered only cash. They provided in kind and left him with his mistress. He fed for his last few days on earth on grapes and champagne. The valet of Swinburne, one of his patrons, read the newspaper to him every afternoon. At one in the morning on Wednesday, December 29, 1897, he died. None of his patrons was with him. He died in peace, with his mistress to close his eyes, having fittingly bequeathed to her the bulk of the money which he had so curiously amassed.

Butler got an invitation to the funeral, Pauli having left instructions that all his patrons were to be invited, presumably so that they might make each other's acquaintance round his coffin. This suggests that he had a taste for bizarre situations. If so, the sight of his funeral would have gratified him—his patrons assembling in Westminster Bridge Road, suspicious of one another, inclined to be nervous, making their way in a body to the Necropolis Station and being carried in a special train to Brookwood Cemetery to watch his interment. Who had paid, they wondered? Did they hear, in answer to their question, Pauli's voice, mocking, gay, indifferent now—"You, all of you"? As the

special train rumbled along they gingerly opened up conversations. Butler avoided some of his fellow-mourners, whose "looks did not please me, especially one who announced himself repeatedly as Pauli's executor," and tacked himself on to others, "whose names I did not know," but who "looked like gentlemen at any rate." Even at Pauli's funeral he was a nearer hanger-on of the best set available. In his compartment there was Lascelles, a friend of Pauli's, whom he recognised from a photograph, and "a most respectable-looking man in the corner," who turned out to be the valet who had read the newspapers to Pauli as he lay on his death-bed. From Lascelles Butler learnt that at the time of his death Pauli had been living in some style in Belgrave Mansions, Grosvenor Gardens, and that his earnings during the period of his own most serious financial difficulties, when it put the greatest strain upon him to continue with Pauli's allowance, had been round about £700 a year. Lascelles also described how scrupulous Pauli was about tipping servants. Butler remembered his own contrary experience, but said nothing.

They assembled in the little chapel, a strange congregation, a sort of inverted version of the scene at Macheath's hanging, when he was confronted with all the women he had seduced and all the bastards he had begotten. After the service, which, Butler says, "was read with an unctuous affectation I have seldom heard exceeded," they proceeded to the open grave, and watched Pauli being lowered into the earth. Then the guests were given a good spread. Butler ate the funeral meats grimly, reflecting that for the first time in his life he was eating a



meal at what might with a little stretching be called Pauli's expense.

So far Butler had preserved his self-possession. He had been collected even under the strain of hearing details of where and how Pauli lived, and of his earnings at the Bar. This self-possession broke down when he heard that there was a considerable estate to be disposed of under Pauli's will. Trembling with agitation, he drew Lascelles aside and whispered to him that Pauli had had "between £6,000 and £7,000 first and last from me." Should he, he asked, tell the executor and put in a claim? Eager, trembling; then he recovered his equilibrium, thought: Others may have suffered, asked Lascelles if he had, heard that Pauli had borrowed no money from Lascelles and thought: Saying anything now will be both useless and undignified, decided to keep mum.

They went back to the train. Lascelles and Butler "got into the same carriage, but after a time the executor, Sam Bircham, a man named Preston, with whom it seems Pauli used to go out yachting, but of whom I had never heard, and Mr. Ainslie, who was by Pauli's desire acting as solicitor for the estate, got into the carriage with us; and the impression is rather strong upon me that they did so with the intention of exploiting me." Butler does not explain how they might have exploited him. He chatted amiably with his fellow-mourners, and later, from Swinburne and Ainslie, pieced together the story of Pauli's infamy.

Pauli's total estate was sworn at £9,000. Butler described the single beneficiary under his will as "a lady, a distant cousin, whose name I



do not remember." "And now," his narrative concludes, "I can bring this squalid, miserable story to an end. On thinking it over, my main feeling is one of thankfulness that I never suspected the facts as I now know them till after Pauli's death. The only decent end of such a white heat of devotion as mine was for him for so many years was the death of one or other of the parties concerned. If I had withdrawn from him and said I should do no more for him, I firmly believe that he would say nothing, leave me, and probably blow his brains out or drown himself. . . . Besides, even though Pauli had not gone under in consequence of my breaking with him, if he had died, as he easily might from any of his winter colds years before the end actually came, I should have been haunted by the fear that I had been the cause of it to my dying day. . . . The thing is over: I am thankful that it is so. I can laugh at the way in which Pauli hoodwinked me; and, as I said to Ainslie, though he left me nothing in his will, he has, in effect, left me from £200-£210 a year, clear of all outgoings, for the luncheons must be taken into account. We both of us laughed somewhat heartily when I took in the luncheons."

Soon after Pauli's death Butler wrote *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. He was particularly interested in the Sonnets because he identified Mr. W. H. with Pauli. It seemed clear to him that Shakespeare's intimacy with Mr. W. H. was just like his with Pauli; and he analysed the Sonnets accordingly. In the first seventeen, he suggests, Shakespeare was urging Mr. W. H. to marry, and only gave up the attempt "because

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Mr. W. H. showed signs of impatience." Between Sonnets 26 and 32 there was a time of absence, and during this time of absence Shakespeare's attitude underwent a change. From a platonic wish to see Mr. W. H. married and settled in life he began to feel an impulse to "plead for love and look for recompense" on his own account. This change, Butler thinks, would not have been effected "unless Mr. W. H. had intended to amuse himself by effecting it. Shakespeare's looks would never have become 'eloquent' unless he had believed Mr. W. H.'s to have already been so. Mr. W. H. must have lured him on—as we have Shakespeare's word that he lured him still more disastrously later. It goes without saying that Shakespeare should not have let himself be lured, but the age was what it was, and I shall show that Shakespeare was very young."

Now came the climax of the story. Mr. W. H. laid a trap for Shakespeare. The idea was for Mr. W. H. to lead him on to make advances, having previously arranged for a party of friends to burst in when he had done so, and surprise them. This trap Butler believes to have been a "cruel and most disgusting practical joke . . . certainly never intended, much less permitted to go beyond the raising of coarse laughter against Shakespeare." It was suggested to him by:

"For why should others' false adulterate eyes  
Give salutation to my sportive blood?"

and by:

"Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day  
And make me travel forth without my cloak?"

"I cannot," Butler wrote, "doubt that Shake-

speare was, to use his own words, made to 'travel forth without' that 'cloak,' which, if he had not been lured, we may be sure that he would not have discarded." What happened was, he suggests, unmistakable! "hardly had he laid the cloak aside before he was surprised according to a preconcerted scheme, and very probably roughly handled, for we find him lame soon afterwards—

("So I, made lame by Fortune's dearest spite,  
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.")

and not fully recovered a twelvemonth later—

("Speak of my lameness and I straight will halt,  
Against thy reasons making no defence.")

Fortunately, according to Butler, Shakespeare was able to live this deplorable affair down, since some nine months later he was writing:

"Ah, do not, when my heart hath scaped this sorrow,  
Come in the rearward of a conquered woe,"

which clearly indicates, he thinks, that he "had begun to find that people held him to have been more sinned against than sinning," and

"That tongue that tells the story of thy days,  
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,  
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise,"

that Mr. W. H.'s prank "was generally regarded as blackguard sport rather than as deliberate malice."

The tragedy was not without its funny side—the unfortunate Shakespeare taking off his cloak and beginning with his breeches, when, to Mr. W. H.'s relief, his friends came in, and, in their rough rollicking way, knocked the Bard about a good deal. Butler takes a lenient view of the

degree of guilt that attaches to Shakespeare. "The offence above indicated," he writes—"a sin of very early youth—for which Shakespeare was bitterly penitent, and toward which not a trace of further tendency can be discerned in any subsequent sonnet or work during five and twenty years of prolific literary activity—this single offence is the utmost that can be brought against Shakespeare with a shadow of evidence in its support."

After this unhappy experience, Shakespeare, according to Butler, reverted to his original project of providing Mr. W. H. with more normal and legitimate satisfaction. He did not now, however, fly as high as marriage, but, as Butler did for Jones, offered his friend his own mistress; "briefly, Shakespeare, unable to induce his friend to marry, and indignant that he should continue to be so unappreciative of the charms of woman, resolved to bring his own mistress and his friend together—believing this (for the age was lax) to be the greatest service that he could render him." The experiment was not a success, even though Shakespeare went to the trouble of writing one of his sonnets for Mr. W. H. to give to his mistress as his own composition. Finally, the *liaison*, "which had lasted but a short time and had given satisfaction to neither party," was broken off. Henceforth, "all traces of anything erotic disappeared finally from the sonnets. There is not a word which suggests any further desire on Shakespeare's part to interfere with Mr. W. H.'s remaining celibate for as long or short a time as he might please," either through his own agency or a third party's. They just gradually drifted apart, as

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Butler and Pauli did, their friendship reviving spasmodically, but really all the time petering out. Sonnet 56—

“ Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said  
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite ”—

“ betrays a sense that the relations between the writer and his friend are not what they were.”  
From:

“ Ah, wherefore with infection should he live  
And with his presence grace impiety ”

Butler deduces that Shakespeare remonstrated with Mr. W. H. for “ associating with what Shakespeare considers to be bad company ”; and from:

“ Sometime all full with feasting on your sight  
And by and by clean starved for a look,”

that “ though Shakespeare is still devoted to Mr. W. H. the intercourse between the two has become intermittent.”

Things got more and more strained. Shakespeare apologised for not writing to Mr. W. H.—

“ Oh, blame me not if I no more can write!  
Look in your glass, and there appears a face  
That over-goes my blunt invention quite,”

but Butler is not impressed with his excuses, “ In the old days,” he argues, “ he found no difficulty in writing when the excuse he now urged was just as valid.” Nor is he impressed with Shakespeare’s plea:

“ Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain  
Full character’d with lasting memory,”

after Mr. W. H. “ has been upbraiding him for having given away a book of tablets of which he

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had made him a present." In the old days, Butler remarks, Shakespeare "would never have let the tablets out of his pocket." Finally, Mr. W. H. complained of Shakespeare "having borne, or schemed to bear, a canopy, presumably over some person of high rank on a great occasion—

Were't aught to me I bore the canopy,  
With my extern the outward honouring,  
Or laid great bases for eternity,  
Which prove more short than waste or ruining?"

Butler's final conclusion is that "considering the cat-and-dog life which, in spite of all Shakespeare's infinite sweetness and forbearance, the two men have long been leading, and considering also how utterly unworthy Mr. W. H. was of the affection which Shakespeare lavished so prodigally upon him, there is nothing to regret or be surprised at in the apparent cessation of future intercourse between them."

*Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* is an excellent example of the limitation of Butler's understanding, in a way a *reductio ad absurdum* of his whole technique. What could be more unutterably absurd than the story he pieces together from the sonnets! Even his contemporary commentators on the Sonnets, on whom he rightly pours such scorn, were more plausible. They denied Shakespeare's homosexuality altogether, whereas Butler reduced it to one unlikely episode, which can only be sustained by the text if "travel forth without my cloak" is taken to mean that Shakespeare had begun to take off his clothes with a view to making improper advances to Mr. W. H., been surprised when he got so far as his cloak and so made off without it.



It is possible that Butler's conception of the Sonnets may have been based on something that actually happened to him when he was with Pauli, and that Pauli may have staged with each of his patrons some little episode of the kind that, according to Butler, Mr. W. H. did with Shakespeare, with a view to having an extra means than his charm and occasional visits of ensuring a continuance of his allowances. Such a possibility gets some support from the vehemence with which Butler defends Shakespeare, pointing out that he was young, lured on by Mr. W. H., never again guilty of a like offence, and not prone to condone such offences—"Considering, then, Shakespeare's extreme youth . . . his ardent poetic temperament—and, alas! it is just the poetic temperament which by reason of its very catholicity is least likely to pass scathless through what he so touchingly describes as 'the ambush of young days,' considering also the licence of the times, Shakespeare's bitter punishment, and still more bitter remorse—is it likely that there was ever afterwards a day in his life in which the remembrance of that 'night of woe' did not at some time or another rise up and stab him? Nay, is it not quite likely that this great shock may in the end have brought him prematurely to the grave?—considering, again, the perfect sanity of all his later work; considering further that all of us who read the Sonnets are as men looking over another's shoulder and reading a very private letter which was intended for the recipient's eye, and for no one else's; considering all these things—for I will not urge the priceless legacy he has left us, nor the fact that the common heart, brain and



conscience of mankind hold him foremost among all Englishmen and the crowning glory of our race—leaving all this on one side, and considering only his youth, the times, penitence, and amendment of life, I believe that those whose judgment we should respect will refuse to take Shakespeare's grave indiscretion to heart more than they do the story of Noah's drunkenness; they will neither blink it nor yet look at it more closely than is necessary in order to prevent men's rank thoughts from taking it to have been more grievous than it was."

This is strong for travelling forth without a cloak—to brood on it night after night. Nor is there anything in Shakespeare's plays which suggests such squeamishness in him. The probability is that it was not so much Shakespeare Butler was justifying as himself. In any case, the similarity between Butler's version of his intimacy with Pauli and his version of Shakespeare's with Mr. W. H. is striking. Shakespeare, like Butler, knew "in his heart . . . that the friendship had been a one-sided affair from first to last"; Mr. W. H. "was vain, heartless, and I cannot think ever cared two straws for Shakespeare, who no doubt bored him"; he was continually tormenting Shakespeare by "promising to come and see him 'if he could,' knowing full well that he meant to go elsewhere," so that Shakespeare would wait "hour after hour for his coming"; it was not Mr. W. H.'s "mere good looks" that attracted Shakespeare, "from first to last it is plain that he assumed that these were but the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace"; their quarrels invariably ended in Shakespeare "kissing the rod." The

very phrase about "passing scathless through the ambush of young days," that Butler uses in his own apologia, he used also in Shakespeare's. "Indeed, I have known cases," he writes, explaining the exaggerated deference of the early sonnets for the person to whom they are addressed, "in which a friend has for years held himself the vassal of another whom he believes to be absolutely dependent upon him."

The sole substantial difference between the two affairs as conceived by Butler is that Shakespeare does not appear to have allowed Mr. W. H. two hundred a year. How he must have searched through the Sonnets for this final corroboration of the identity of his own passion for Pauli with Shakespeare's for Mr. W. H.! I even tried myself to help him out by the application of his own method, but met with not much success. The nearest I could get was:

"These offices, so oft as thou wilt look  
Shall profit thee and much enrich thy book,"

which, if book be taken as pass-book abbreviated for the purpose of rhythm, might be stretched to imply an allowance paid quarterly. There is, in any case, a strong hint of Pauli in Butler's explanation of why Mr. W. H. allowed Thorpe to publish the Sonnets—"He was in great straits for money, and was glad of the few shillings which were all Thorpe would be likely to give him for the copy."

Butler credited Shakespeare with sexual impulses as timid as his own, admitting at the most the possibility of a single misdemeanour to be repented of afterwards each night for thirty years. He found sentimental friendships with

men somehow less tumultuous than loving women. They were drier and barren. The commitments they involved were defined—in the case of Pauli two hundred a year. Though it pained him to hand over money, thrilled too, it pained him more to hand over himself. He could just bring himself to make out a cheque for Pauli; but to give his very being, and without knowing the full consequences; throw aside all his defences and drop helpless on another body—that was insufferable. He avoided it. His homosexuality was more psychological than physiological. He craved for utter unreality; and however humdrum and impersonal he made normal sexual relations, they were still too real to satisfy his spirit's hunger. For that he needed something absolutely fanciful, divorced from whatever existed and had life, love that passeth the love of woman, the abstract essence of love, love that could be thought instead of felt. Like Ernest he chose "the nearest course to the one from which he was debarred that circumstances would allow." The nearest course was doting on Pauli, eating with him down, down, down on to the bone, sustaining an intimacy to the end of Pauli's life that was "so close as to warrant his taking money from me."

## IV

### PATTERN FOR LIVING

"One writer left little or nothing about himself and the world complained that it was puzzled; another, mindful of this, left copious details about himself, whereon the world said it was even more puzzled about him than about the man who had left nothing, till presently it found out it was also bored and troubled itself no more about either."

—*Note Books.*

No one ever took such pains as Butler to let posterity know the sort of man he was. He was his favourite model, and all his writing is self-portraiture. Every fragment of correspondence, including postcards, was pressed and carefully filed; every thought, however trivial, that crossed his mind piously preserved in the little note-book he carried always in his waistcoat pocket and that he recommended as a necessary article for any man-of-letters. He swept himself up, the minutest crumbs; he dissected himself; he embalmed his spirit and laid it out, like a Pharaoh's body, to last for all time; he—this would have appealed to him—put himself in the bank to multiply at compound interest for ever. As he came to reconcile himself to not being recognised during his lifetime, so he built more and more on the recognition he was sure was coming to him after his death, classifying, sorting, destroying, so as to leave behind him intact his pattern for living.

This pattern for living he built up slowly and

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cautiously as married couples build up a home. People, he said to himself, who have a good income, an annual holiday abroad, plenty to occupy them, no family encumbrances, a few select friends, a faithful droll servant, are happy, and decided to acquire these requisites for a happy life; longed for his father's death, which, when at last it happened, made available a good income; acquired Jones and Mr. Cathie for the rôles of select friend and faithful droll servant; spent two months on the Continent each year, and, for an occupation, worked over and over the deposits which his mind had accumulated. Now, he said to himself, I am happy. Now, Jones echoed, he is happy. Now, they chanted together, beards wagging, we are happy.

Not merely did Butler spend laborious days laying himself out for posthumous veneration, getting just the right expression in the mouth, the right light in the eyes, placing his hands so on his breast; he bred up a biographer to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. He emptied Jones and poured in his own spirit, confident that, in so doing, he was immortalising himself and his pattern for living. In a sense he was. Jones's *Memoir* enshrines him as faithfully as Lenin is enshrined in his glass case. The pattern for living is there in all its detail, materialist conception of Butler.

Jones and Butler used to meet first of all in a friend's rooms, whom Butler liked as long as he liked Handel, and whom he detested as soon as he began to admit that there were other composers. Conversation was about music, since they had all come hot from a Monday Popular Concert. At that time Butler had not "com-

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pletely broken with high-class modern music." Jones kept in the background. He was younger than the others, only twenty-four when Butler first got to know him, and very diffident and timid, one of those large, awkward young men, beloved by their mothers, who so often form a sort of background at literary or musical gatherings, who are diligent in their attendance at unlikely lectures, and who, when they have money, in middle life publish at their own expense volumes of poems or essays; when without money, become local and municipal wiseacres, picturesquely bearded, givers of library talks and presiders over public lectures on cultural subjects.

Butler quite liked him at once, but did not "guess how much he would develop later on." He found Jones "did not sit upon me, nor bully me, and was benevolently disposed towards me," he also found that he liked Handel and played a little himself. Butler was always expecting everyone to sit on him and bully him. All mankind, like his father and mother, were constantly conspiring to depreciate his talents, and make him of no account. Jones's softness and pliability appealed enormously to him, especially when he found that their tastes were not dissimilar. Jones, he felt, could be fashioned after his own likeness. He was a disciple and an audience.

Henceforth they saw each other more and more, and spent a few weeks together in Italy. Jones brought his songs to Butler, and tried them on him. He did not like them much, though one, about silks and fine array, he found tolerable. He could just bear to listen to Jones trumpeting it out—"Silks and Fine Array!" On the whole,



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however, Jones's songs "were not in my line." At this stage Butler found Jones "easily pleased, very patient, more free than anyone I have ever met from affectation or bounce of any kind, very gentle in all his ways, and, in fact, in all respects singularly amiable." He was like, he says, a large accumulation of dry fuel which only needed a spark to blaze into a fire of rebellion, and he soon realised that he was to be the spark, that, since Jones was with him "not for half an hour at a time once in a month or six weeks, but day after day and all day long for days together, the lighting was a matter of course."

It came, the lighting. Jones burst into flames, and Butler warmed his hands delightedly at them. Of course, the flames were not absolutely steady to begin with. On their first Italian holiday Jones would persist in making "some pretence of reading at odd times the dreadful books he had brought with him." One morning Butler went into his bedroom and saw him hurriedly smuggle a book under the bedclothes. "There now, you have been reading that damned *Republic* again," he said sternly. Jones hung his head, blushed, at last confessed to the crime. "Don't let it happen again," Butler said in a gentler tone. "I doubt," he writes, "whether he has ever reopened the *Republic* of Plato from that day to this."

Then again Jones "wrote poetry, and he liked his mother, and did not speak ill of his elder sister. He had one brother whom he did not like, but there was no other member of his family to whom he was actively hostile." This was, from Butler's point of view, a very serious matter. He set himself to wean Jones from such deplorable

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amiability, and managed to estrange him from his mother completely, and from his sister partially. Jones used occasionally to abandon himself to secret bouts of filial affection, and once tearfully confessed to Butler that do what he would he could not manage to detest an elderly maiden aunt. On the whole, however, he absorbed Butler's attitude towards family ties pretty thoroughly, and used sometimes to outdo even him in his screeching denunciations of his parents, and in his whining over the wrongs he had suffered at their hands.

As their friendship ripened, Jones became more and more like Butler, modelling his life, his mannerisms, his very appearance, on Butler's. Butler brought him up carefully, tenderly, watching each stage in his progress as a teacher that of a favourite pupil. "Jones made no secret of not getting on well with his mother now," he triumphantly records, "no more he would have done when I was abroad with him, but he did not know then how superficial was the sympathy between them. In reality he felt towards her much as he does now, but he did not know what it was." This gratifying result was achieved, Butler points out complacently, not by any forcing process, but just by letting nature take its course. He felt that Jones was a bigger and a better man as a result of the course of training to which he submitted him. Even his songs began to be tolerable. No more "Silks and Fine Array." He would bring them to Butler like a schoolboy an essay, and Butler would shake his head over them, but still hold out hopes of improvement. Then, one day, "he played me a certain fugue. . . . This hit me off

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to a nicety. It was what I wanted, and I was very much pleased." Afterwards Jones wrote another fugue; and it was used in the overture to the opera, *Narcissus*, that he and Butler composed together. Butler liked this fugue "better than any that I had known as written since Handel's time."

They went on composing music together, and going for walks. Butler "had an ordnance map of the country thirty miles round London, one inch to the mile, on which he marked his walks with red ink"; and Jones, when he began to join him on these walks, "of course, started an ordnance map of my own." Also, in the course of their first Italian holiday, he became "a convinced Lamarckian . . . seeing design in everything." With an ordnance map of his own, and a convinced Lamarckian, Butler began to take a real pride in him and to feel sanguine about his prospects. He was gentle in his methods; he "did not want to frighten or shock Jones, and thought it better to let matters take their course." *Narcissus* is characteristic of the course they took. It is meant to be funny. Butler calls it a "cantata, or serenata, or comic oratorio, or oratorio buffo." As ultimately published, it was described as a "dramatic cantata," and Butler wrote of it: "In *Narcissus* . . . I made an attempt, the failure of which has yet to be shown, to return to the principles of Handel and take them up where he left off." The libretto is about investments, and might, if set to light music, occasionally raise a laugh amongst the sort of people who find it possible to sit through Gilbert and Sullivan operas again and again. It is not, however, set to light music, but to ponderous, reverent imitations of

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Handel, the facetiousness of the libretto adding to the ponderousness of the music, and the ponderousness of the music making the facetiousness of the libretto even more painful than it naturally is.

Jones was a solicitor, but did not thrive at the profession. His employer found him slow, "which," Butler says, "doubtless he is, or rather was as a young man"—was, that is, until Butler had taken him in hand. Then he brightened up. The understanding with his employers was that he was to be taken into partnership, but this did not materialise. When Butler came into his inheritance in 1887, he made Jones an allowance of £200 a year, which went on until 1900, when Jones's mother died. Paying was something very sacred in his eyes. The £200 a year sealed, consummated, his friendship with Jones. Pay this, receipt this, in remembrance of me. He had some difficulty with Jones's mother. She did not like the idea of her son leaving his profession and being entirely dependent on Butler. It struck her as a peculiar and rather hazardous arrangement. Butler wrote her a long letter, dated February 3, 1887, pointing out that Jones was not cut out for being a lawyer, that he had "been very good and very patient for a number of years," and that now a chance had come for him to be financially independent. "The proposal," he wrote, "is one which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred should be immediately rejected, but I venture to submit that in the present case it ought not to be so. Your son is not robust, and I have often seen him in a state in which I have felt strongly what a very great safeguard against serious illness it would be

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to him if, when he got low, he were able to take a few days change and country air." Fifteen years later he wrote on this letter: "as a matter of fact if I had not done what I then did Jones, as all who knew the facts see as well as I do, would have been either dead or imbecile years ago," and regarding the correspondence as a whole he noted: "It does not appear from the foregoing that the main reason for my wishing Jones to give up law was that he was continually breaking down in health—recently more and more so—and that if he did not give up law, law before long would give up him. The comparative freedom from pressure saved him from brain breakdowns for some few years, but . . . about 1895 . . . he broke down again . . . has never since been capable of sustained exertion, and, I grieve to say, is obviously rapidly failing. That there is serious brain mischief I cannot doubt. The doctor who attends both him and me tells me he is sure it is so, but we both of us disabuse Jones of the notion, and lay his symptoms to liver and stomach." In his account of his friendship with Jones, published in *Butleriana* as "Jones and Myself," he gives a list of Jones's commonest complaints. These were rheumatism, nervous exhaustion, eczema, impetigo and a quick succession of carbuncles. In addition, Jones suffered constantly from piles, and both of them from diarrhoea and boils.

. . . . .

On Sundays they went for long walks. Butler planned their route meticulously. He prepared a careful list of what they must take with them—cigarettes and mouthpieces in the right-hand

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pocket of his overcoat. As they plodded along they talked. Did Jones weary of it? "It would probably be correct to say that I have heard him speak the substance of every note many times in different contexts," he writes in his preface to the first edition of the *Note Books*. This, to a mere reader of the *Note Books*, seems excessive. They plodded along and talked, sometimes through rain, sometimes with a cold wind stinging their faces, Jones towering up, Butler trotting along beside him.

On work days they did their writing and music and painting. Jones was free now. He was free to write and compose and paint, express himself. Butler helped him with all three, educated him, read him extracts from his writings, accepted suggestions, found it helpful to talk over a knotty problem with him. Often they went abroad together, agreeing about this and that, finding Italians such and such, Frenchmen such and such, coming to unanimous conclusions about pictures and hotels, wandering here and there, covering longer distances and carrying more apparatus than on their Sunday outings. Their friendship was untroubled, the harmony between them perfect. Only sometimes Jones had his fits of hysteria. Sometimes he cried and got distraught, became ill and retired to bed. Then, unless his sister Lil took possession of him first, Butler nursed him. He made a devoted nurse, sitting all night by the bedside of his friend, mixing medicine for him, accurately counting out drops, neatly depositing powders on his tongue. Jones had trouble with his breathing. His breath came thickly, moistly. Through long nights Butler listened to the damp, thick sounds of Jones



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breathing as he sat, pensive, beside his sleeping form. When Lil carried Jones off to her house in Hampstead with a bad attack of pneumonia and refused to let Butler see him, Butler was bitterly hurt, especially as he had sent Lil flowers and fruit when she was living on the Riviera. He wrote every day, addressing the letters to her, and suggesting she should retail such bits to Jones as she thought would be good for him.

They shared a mistress, Madame Dumas. Jones went to her on Tuesday afternoons and Butler on Wednesdays. They paid a pound a week each, and generously continued it even when they were out of town. Madame Dumas lived in Handel Street, which was nearly sacrilege, but they managed to make jokes about it, as Roman Catholics sometimes do about the Holy Ghost. Butler picked up Madame Dumas first in Islington in 1872, and established regular relations. He then put Jones in the way of going to her, but did not disclose his name and address until he had been going to her for fifteen years. Jones makes no mention of his own usage of Handel Street, which is a pity, because it would have been interesting to have a first-hand account of the way Butler opened up the subject, and at what stage in Jones's upbringing he felt justified in making him free of Madame's person. Both Madame's pounds, of course, really came from Butler, since she died before Jones came into his inheritance. I imagine Jones, when Butler prescribed Madame, a little nervous, not exactly shocked, but in the same mood as a sexually emancipated young woman when her sexual emancipation is to be put to the test, determined not to show his nervousness, his voice a little

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tremulous all the same, his tongue a little dry. Butler prescribed Madame as he prescribed breaking with Mrs. Jones, and with the law, and with Plato's *Republic*, and composing Handelian music, and going for country walks on Sundays, and taking two months abroad each year. Madame was a part of his pattern for living, and so Jones had to have her. Probably, like his employer, she found him a bit slow, at least at the beginning.

They went to lectures together; one rather a high-brow affair, in a little hall, several rows of elderly ladies, occasional men and themselves. While they were waiting for the lecturer to come in Butler ostentatiously took out the *Sporting Times*, and Jones looked over his shoulder. They chuckled, looked round delightedly, such gay, irreverent fellows, so daringly defiant—"We went at the beginning of this month to hear a lecture on evolution by a man named Weldon. It was very dull; we thought it would be, but I thought I rather ought to go. I sat just below James Martineau; he looked very old; I think he knew me but am not sure. Jones and I arrived some half-an-hour before the lecture began, so we brought out the *Bird o' Freedom* and the *Sporting Times*, perhaps the two most uncultured papers in London, and read them while waiting."

The only part of his life that Butler did not share with Jones was his lunches with Pauli, and this was more out of deference to Pauli than a wish to monopolise his companionship. Pauli drew the line at Jones except in the way of business. There was a question at one time of Jones's going as a solicitor to Shanghai, and Butler suggested his talking the matter over with Pauli, who, he

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constantly insists, was a man of the world, and therefore able to advise on such matters. Jones readily agreed, and took his problem to Pauli, who duly advised. "I saw Pauli frequently after this," Jones records, "but only on business, for he would have nothing to do with any of Butler's friends in any other way." What the business was he does not explain. According to Butler, Jones never had any business except what he put in his way in connection with some house property he had.

Hans and Remi Faesch were more accommodating than Pauli, and included Butler equally with Jones in their affection, though it was Jones who first picked up with Hans in the train between Basel and Calais, and got to know Remi, Hans's brother, when Hans was away in Singapore. Remi wrote to them jointly:

"MY DEAR MR. BUTLER AND MY DEAR  
MR. JONES—

"I have received your's very nice and friendly letter, his contents would be very fine if I was a free man. I have had my holidays, and in a busy house it is not allowed to come and go whenever we will. Oh! I would, I would! but . . . it is impossible to go out only for one day. My dear Sirs, your proposition is so fine and so amiable, but it is impossible, it is not given me to live longer with my two excellent patrons. Now I begin by the beginning. My mother send you her best love and will you pray to supper by her at home Friday evening instead of suppering in the hotel. I like more to be alone with you because first I will enjoy you

## THE EARNEST ATHEIST

alone and too I speak better when I am alone with you, but my mother will have you by her and I am also content. . . . I hope to live with you Sunday on going and returning. . . . It would be a great arrogance for me to command you on a place to come to you (My mother does not say anything. What the two English gentlemen does is well! That is my only ideal). . . . On this Sunday I hope to have you both, your body and your mind, and I will profit by your talents and your English. Perhaps you will return also on a Sunday and we will live another day. The luck will not move for this year and we can make nothing about it than be calmly because God is sitting in the regiment, he is very wise, and what he does is well done! That is the greatest philosopher without intellect. About all that we speak when my Mr. Butler is sitting on one side and his dear friend Jones on the other side of me. In attending this time I rest always yours very thankfully,

“ R. FAESCH.”

Hans accompanied them on their walks. He was in London to learn English, and so was on the look-out for idiomatic phrases. A photograph of him, that Butler kept, with a red-plush frame and with pressed edelweiss decorating its border, suggests a soapy complexion, high stiff collar, trimmed moustache and black clothes. Jones and Butler usually referred to him as “our dear little man” or “our dear little fellow.” Like Remi, he profited by their talents and their English. Butler’s manner towards him was

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tender and at the same time patronising. He talked about the same things to him as to Jones, but in more elementary terms, using simpler illustrations. It was the difference between a League of Nations Union lecturer addressing undergraduates and the top classes in a girls' school. At times he was on the verge of falling into baby talk, as: "And then, near one temple, we found a mamma tortoise with a dear little baby tortoise, just like Alfred and his baby."

When Hans left London for Singapore on February 14, 1895, Butler and Jones saw him off from Holborn Viaduct Station. "He was not well," Jones writes; "the weather was cold and boisterous; we were afraid that the journey would be too much for him and that the climate of the East would not suit him." The scene so moved Butler that, though he despised most poetry and most poets, particularly contemporary ones, he turned to verse to express it. That same evening he laid aside his translation of the *Iliad*, his speculation about the authorship of the *Odyssey*, and produced this, of which he wrote to Jones that he considered it to be "the best thing I ever wrote——"

## IN MEMORIAM H.R.F.

Out, out, out into the night,  
With the wind bitter north-east and the sea rough;  
You have a racking cough and your lungs are weak,  
But out, out into the night you go,  
    So guide you and guard you, Heaven, and fare you  
    well!

We have been three lights to one another, and now we are  
    two,  
But you go far and alone into the darkness;  
But the light in you was clearer and stronger than ours,

### THE EARNEST ATHEIST

For you came straighter from God, and, whereas we had  
learned,  
You had never forgotten. Three minutes more and then—  
Out, out into the night you go:  
So guide you and guard you, Heaven, and fare you  
well!

Never a cross look, never a thought,  
Never a word that had better been left unspoken;  
We gave you the best we had, such as it was,  
We pleased you well, for you smiled and nodded your  
head;  
And now, out, out into the night you go,  
So guide you and guard you, Heaven, and fare you  
well!

You said we were a little weak that the three of us wept;  
Are we, then, weak if we laugh when we are glad?  
When men are under the knife let them roar as they will,  
So that they flinch not.  
Therefore let tears flow on, for so long as we live  
No such second sorrow shall ever draw nigh us,  
Till one of us two leaves the other alone  
And goes out, out, out into the night,  
So guard the one that is left, O God, and fare him  
well!

Yet for the great bitterness of this grief  
We three, you and he and I,  
May pass into the hearts of like true comrades hereafter,  
In whom we may weep anew and yet comfort them,  
As they too pass out, out, out into the night,  
So guide them and guard them, Heaven, and fare them  
well.

The minutes have flown and he whom we loved is gone,  
The like of whom we never again shall see.  
The wind is heavy with snow and the sea rough,  
He has a racking cough and his lungs are weak.  
Hand in hand we watch the train as it glides  
Out, out, out into the night.  
So take him into thy holy keeping, O Lord,  
And guide him and guard him for ever, and fare him  
well!



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Butler called the poem "In Memoriam H. R. F." because he was convinced he would not see Hans again. This gloomy prognostication was not fulfilled. He did see him again. His first intention was to publish the poem. He showed it to Jones and Alfred and Mrs. Bovill, and wrote to Hans that he was "not comfortable about publishing it, but of course all names will be carefully concealed. I wanted to set you and Jones and myself together, as it were, in a ring where we might stay and live together in the hearts of the kind of people we should have loved had we known them. . . . I think the lines are so obviously true and so simple that the best people would like them, and finding Jones and Mrs. Bovill agree with me, I decided to let the thing go." Hans, whose mind had the literal precision of the Continental atheist, when the poem was sent to him expressed surprise that Butler, holding the views he did, should have made use of such expressions as "Guide you and guard you, Heaven," and "Take him into thy holy keeping, O Lord." In reply Butler indignantly repudiated the charge of weakening in his opposition to organised religion: "You must not think that I am becoming more a believer in prayer and all that sort of thing than I was. We think exactly the same, but I know no words to express a very deeply felt hope so well as those I have used, and the fact that others make money by prostituting them shall not stop me from using them when I am in the humour for doing so." The same point cropped up later on when Hans had conscientious scruples about making friends with a Roman Catholic; "Never mind," Butler wrote to him,

## THE EARNEST ATHEIST

"about De Gelembert's being a Roman Catholic if he is a good fellow otherwise. . . . I hate all that rubbish, whether Catholic or Protestant, more and more the older I grow and, so far from becoming indifferent to it, the sense of the harm it does in a thousand ways and of its utter unworthiness impresses me more and more continually. I loathe it. But, at the same time, I think we oppose it more effectually by treating it with silent contempt than by arguing about it. In fact I am not sure that the best way of dealing with those who are on the other side is not to pretend to agree with them a little more than one really does rather than argue with them."

In the event, the poem was never published, according to Jones because Butler's literary agent was unable to find anyone to take it. The real reason for its non-publication is given in a letter from Butler to Hans dated June 6, 1895—"About the poem, which I consider to be the best thing I ever wrote, things have happened in England which make Jones and me decide not to publish it even anonymously. So it will be left with my papers. At any other time it would probably have been all right. But people are such fools." On Butler's pressed copy of this letter there is a note to the effect that the event referred to is the trial of Oscar Wilde. Butler wrote hurriedly to his literary agent asking to have the poem back. Thankfully he received it, thankfully hid it away along with the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh*, love and hate alike needing to be hidden.

For some weeks after Hans had gone, Jones and Butler could speak of nothing else but him.

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"I feel," Butler writes, "as though I had lost an only son with no hope of another." Like most of Butler's intimates, Hans was sickly, but, unlike Jones and Pauli, not in receipt of a pension from him. Butler's impulse was to make him financially dependent; if he happened to find when he got to Singapore that he did not want to stay there, "then, my dear Hans, let me beseech you in the name of all the affection a dear father can bear a very dear son, by the absurd, idiotic tears that you have wrung from me, by those we wrung from yourself, by the love which Jones bears you and which you bear towards him—if these will not prevail with you nothing will—apply to me. . . . I mean draw on me at once for your passage money and necessary expenses and come home."

Jones and Butler talked constantly about their "dear little fellow," their "dear little man." If they were offered the choice of enjoying his company or Shakespeare's for half an hour, they wondered at Stratford-on-Avon, which would they choose, and decided on Shakespeare, but more from a sense of duty than because their inclinations lay that way. "What we want are photos of yourself as big and as sharp as we can get them. The camera I sent you should take a face as big as a shilling—if you can get it as big as eighteenpence, so much the better," Butler wrote, and told Mr. Cathie simply to say "Hans" whenever he spoke bad-temperedly to him—"Yesterday Alfred was teasing me when I was busy, and I spoke a little sharply. Then, immediately remembering, I said: 'My dear Alfred, if I ever speak crossly like that please to say "Hans" at once and it will stop me.'"

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With time, however, their passion cooled. They met Remi, who also became "our dear little man." "Remi," Butler wrote to Jones only a few weeks after Hans's departure, "did not do anything special, but I saw his face working several times. He attracted me. At times his face is very beautiful, and then again directly he is plain. I never saw anyone's face assume such an infinite variety of expressions. You said the same of dear Hans, but I noticed it even more in Remi."

Hans, for his part, was obviously a little tired of them. He had picked up all the English idioms he wanted, and found their protestations of affection wearisome, even hinted that Butler should not write to him too often. Their letters gradually became more and more tepid. "You dear person" replaced "our dear little man," "a whole prayer-book-full of the most beautiful good and kind wishes which a grandfather may send to a very dear grandson" replaced "and now with every loving and affectionate thought which one man can think about another." Instead of pouring out his affection, Butler poured out the contents of the *Note Books*, describing how he went up to Miss Jane Harrison "and determined to mash her," then on an excursion to Mycenae, "met five ladies—very nice all of them—and we mashed each other in fine style."

In 1898 Hans came over to Europe for a holiday, and, as Jones puts it, "to make arrangements for a change in his life in the East." This was Jones's way of announcing Hans's intention to get married, a subject about which he was understandably touchy. At the same time, he

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behaved with great gallantry, actually praising Hans's future bride, Miss Rabe, and presenting her with a locket containing a lock of Hans's hair that he had been in the habit of wearing himself. "Miss Rabe," he wrote to Butler, "really is a very nice girl . . . I think she is very suitable—of course not good enough for him, but he can only choose from what there is. . . . As soon as it was all settled and Mother had approved, I took my silver locket off my chain and gave it to her, and she wears it on a chain round her neck now. Hans has promised to give me some more hair." Butler was equally gallant in reply. "I hope," he wrote, "that Miss Rabe will be a success. You did very prettily about the locket. I had better share mine with you month by month, turn and turn about."

On the whole there does not seem to have been much jubilation in Clifford's Inn over Hans's return from Singapore; and when he went out, out, out into the night on his return journey, there was not the same passionate unhappiness and rich poetic yield as on the previous occasion. Perhaps the lowered emotional temper was due to his leaving from Waterloo instead of Holborn Viaduct, or perhaps to Butler's annoyance at having misnamed a poem of which he thought so highly as he did of "In Memoriam H. R. F.," or perhaps to Miss Rabe. Hans was murdered, it was generally believed by a discarded native mistress, in 1903, over a year after Butler's death. Jones deposited the last trophy of his and Butler's joint affection in the British Museum, in the form of an article in the *Basler Jahrbuch* entitled "Erlebnisse eines

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Basler Kaufmanns in Laos. Autobiographische Skizzen von Hans Rudolf Fäesch."

No man could more completely merge himself in another than Jones did in Butler. Their minds were so attuned that they functioned as one. They went to Handel Street, on different afternoons certainly, but to an identical sexual experience, and on the same terms; they held their loves and their purse in common, and spent a large part of every day and most of their holidays in each other's company. When Butler took Jones to Arona to show him Isabella, Jones "of course fell in love with her on the spot." Their very letters were mostly in the first person plural. Like a king or a married couple they wrote as "we." Apart from a short break in 1897, when Jones travelled abroad with his mother, this went on until Mrs. Jones died in 1900, leaving Jones comfortably off. While Jones was abroad with his mother Butler was jealous. His letters were full of abuse of her; and he was particularly hurt when Jones discussed their occasional tiffs with Mrs. Jones. "I note," he wrote, "what you say about your mother—fancy her bursting into tears like a naughty child. . . . I do not see why we should take so much pains to impress her. She must evidently have something more about her than meets the eye or we should not take such great pains to bring any little huff we get before her notice. I should be sorry to think that our efforts in this direction had any source except in the mere fact of her being your mother—which she could not help." On another occasion he wrote: "It



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must depress you very much being with that awful woman your mother, especially after having been so long with me."

Like a too-easy and too-zealous convert, Jones had a strong strain of insincerity. He outdid Butler when he was with him in abusing his mother and sister, but when he was with them he weakened, even tolerated their abuse of Butler. He wanted to please and impress Mrs. Jones for the same reason that Butler made cuts in *Erewhon* with a view to placating his father—to avoid being disinherited; but more than this, in spite of Butler's careful inculcation of family hatred, he continued really to be under his mother's and his sister's influence. After Butler's death he lived with his sister Lil, which Butler would have regarded as living in sin; and it is noticeable how, in the *Memoir*, he does nothing to spare the Butler family's feelings—indeed, goes out of his way to improve on Butler's abuse of them—whereas he leaves out everything which would reflect on his own family and reveal the manner in which, under Butler's inspiration, he made a speciality of heaping similar abuse on them.

When Jones became financially independent of Butler his manner towards him underwent an immediate change. He declined going on their Sunday walks on the ground that they tired him out too much; he met Butler on fewer and fewer evenings; he made new friends to whom he did not even introduce Butler, or of whom Butler did not approve; he found a successor to Madame, who had died in 1892, but without sharing with Butler. This estrangement between them was intensified by the capture of Jones's

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sick body by his sister when he was ill with pneumonia, and her refusal to allow Butler to see him. Though direct references to their estrangement have been carefully omitted from the *Memoir*, certain indications that it existed crept in. For instance, in the course of a letter to Jones, written when he was abroad in 1901, and quoted in the *Memoir*, Butler writes: "I have got on with Miss Savage's and my correspondence, being now just half-way through. I am shocked to see how badly I treated her, always thinking and writing about myself and never about her. If I have been as selfish and egoistic to you as I was to her, it will explain a great deal." Explain what? There is nothing in the *Memoir* to show. Again, there is a poem called "Academic Exercise," of whose significance Jones says he has not an inkling, but that, he thinks, probably refers to Pauli. It was written some years after Pauli's death, so that it is difficult to see how it can refer to him, or anyone except Jones himself:

We were two lovers standing sadly by  
While our two loves lay dead upon the ground;  
Each love has striven not to be first to die,  
But each was gashed with many a cruel wound.  
Said I: "Your love was false while mine was true."  
Aflood with tears he cried: "It was not so,  
'Twas your false love my true love falsely slew—  
For 'twas your love that was the first to go."  
Thus did we stand and said no more for shame  
Till I, seeing his cheek so wan and wet,  
Sobbed thus: "So be it; my love shall bear the blame;  
Let us inter them honourably." And yet  
I swear by all truth human and divine  
'Twas his that in its death throes murdered mine.

The most unmistakable indication of how strained Butler's relations with Jones became was

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his last-minute alteration in his will, making Streatfield instead of Jones his literary executor, leaving Jones only a legacy of £500, and insisting that all the money he had ever received from Butler should be paid into his estate—"I have made Jones promise that the money I have given him shall all be refunded to my nephew. I do not intend to have a second Pauli." That was, for Butler, the bitterest of all reproaches—a second Pauli! It is true that Butler was of the opinion that Jones after 1895 had "never been capable of sustained exertion, and I grieve to say is obviously rapidly failing," and that he could not doubt the existence of "serious brain mischief," while Jones told the doctors attending Butler that Butler "had never really been well since 1895, when he went to Greece and the Troad." Each dated the other's collapse from the same year. In the year of his death Butler was relieved to find Jones looking well and not showing "even the smallest sign of brain weakness;" he was "cheerful and evidently doing his best to make himself agreeable. So you may be sure was I, and that is about the best we can either of us do."

None the less, Jones has been able to present his friendship with Butler as a perfect one, one of those rare relationships based on a perfect understanding between two men of like minds and with like values. It would take a Butler adequately to inveigh against all those of his admirers who have accepted the validity of this perfect friendship, as presented by Jones, without ever wondering why Butler's will should have been so suddenly and so drastically changed; why, when Butler was lying desperately ill at

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Palermo and Jones only a few hours away at Ancona, he yet did not go to him, nor was sent for; why such a poem as "Academic Exercise" should have been written at such a time; what Butler meant by "If I have been as selfish and egoistic to you as I was to her, it will explain a great deal"; above all how it came about that the obvious choice for his literary executor was not made—the friend with whom he had discussed every page of every one of his books many times over, who had been his collaborator in a hundred ways, who, as he wrote himself, "had suggested, if not more," passages that abound in all his books after *Life and Habit*, who was his intimate, his shadow, himself. Instead of this friend he chose Streatfield, an official at the British Museum, with whom he had come into little more than professional contact.

Butler would undoubtedly have called the *Memoir's* falsification of the later phases of his friendship with Jones a "sleight of hand," and have dealt with it in the same way that, for instance, in *Evolution, Old and New*, he dealt with Darwin's saying that "natural selection is the most important means of modification," and then slipping in "cause" instead of "means" without anyone except Butler noticing, or that he handled Shakespearean commentators and the *Dictionary of National Biography* in *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. His own pose of at all costs avoiding self-deception—"We can forgive a man for almost any falsehood," he writes in the character of John Pickard Owen in *The Fair Haven*, "provided we feel that he was under strong temptation and well knew that he was deceiving . . . but, what can we feel towards one who

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for a small motive tells lies even to himself, and does not know that he is lying? What useless rotten figwood lumber must not such a thing be made of, and what lies will there not come out of it, falling in every direction upon all who come within its reach. The common self-deceiver of modern society is a more dangerous and contemptible object than almost any ordinary felon"—wore pretty thin at times, for instance in connection with his father's death, his wanting him to die so as to inherit his money, and yet never quite caring to admit as much even in his notes and intimate letters, never quite caring to put down on paper when he heard that his father was ill: "Oh, that he might die!" yet feeling this, and feeling it passionately. In Jones's case the pose wore even thinner. Butler had no real right to grumble about Jones's desertion. He who built so much on the validity of money should not have grudged its power to estrange him from Jones as it had bound Jones to him. Yet he did grumble. Even Pauli continued to eat hurried lunches with him three times a week all through the months that he had no money to give him; but Jones, whom he had brought up as a father a son, as a teacher a favourite pupil, as God a Chosen People, fashioning his mind and soul, even body, in his own likeness—Jones deserted him, and he was alone. Then his heart broke. Then he gave up the ghost; and Jones, who in a sense had killed him, was left to exploit his remains.

. . . . .

With Butler dead, Jones filled out. Though he was not technically the literary executor, he

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was spiritually. Streatfield required his help; and it was abundantly forthcoming. He delivered lectures on Butler; he read papers on Butler; he wrote articles on Butler; he travelled across Europe distributing manuscripts and other Butler mementoes; the British Museum and St. John's College were laps into which he dropped gifts; he organised and presided over Erewhon Dinners attended by a distinguished company—the *Memoir* gives the list with titles and degrees—"Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B., LL.D., Professor Hartog, Bernard Shaw, the Right Honourable Augustine Birrell, Sir William Phipson Beale, Bart., K.C., M.P. . . ."

When Streatfield died, his cup of happiness was full. Manuscripts, note-books, piles of pressed letters and postcards, negatives, sketches, musical compositions, account-books, paintings—all were brought to his house at Maida Vale. He lived, benign, amongst them. The War came and went, and he scarcely noticed it, so occupied was he with delivering his lectures, reading his papers, presiding over dinners. What a change was here from the days when his employer found him "slow," when Butler "could not doubt the existence of serious brain mischief," when his Sundays were spent in trudging about the countryside, and his evenings in listening to interminable expositions of Butler's theories about evolution, the Odyssey, the Sonnets, and all for a paltry two hundred a year! His life proceeded smoothly, easily, only an occasional visit to the dentist disturbing its placidity. His sister Lil, whom he had so often delighted Butler by ridiculing, looked after him perfectly, kept him sleek and content. She herself



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was literary. They were both literary. For a while Mr. Cathie was with them. He was useful for a time; then his presence became irksome and he was dismissed. For an occupation, there was the *Memoir*. It took years. Everything was put into it, everything. It necessitated an extensive correspondence, visits to Cambridge and abroad. He put the *Memoir* together slowly, in the same way that diners with good digestions, and nothing to do after dinner, eat. It is shapeless, yet impressive, a huge, shapeless monument to Jones's egotism. In matters of detail he was meticulously accurate; corroborated, theorised, quoted. His industry was sparse, but extensive. There was a whole lifetime before him, and nothing to fill it except the *Memoir*. He had no need to hurry, had ample time to scrape out the dish, spoon up every fragment to go into his cake.

It was one of Butler's favourite sayings that immortality means living on in those whom we have loved. The idea is well expressed in the only good poem he wrote:

Not on sad Stygian shore, nor in clear sheen  
Of far Elysian plain, shall we meet those  
Among the dead whose pupils we have been,  
Nor those great shades whom we have held as foes;  
No meadow of asphodel our feet shall tread,  
Nor shall we look each other in the face  
To love or hate each other being dead,  
Hoping some praise or fearing some disgrace.  
We shall not argue saying " 'Twas thus " or " Thus,"  
Our argument's whole drift we shall forget;  
Who's right, who's wrong, 'twill be all one to us;  
We shall not even know that we have met.  
Yet meet we shall, and part, and meet again,  
Where dead men meet, on lips of living men.

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This sort of immortality he has had in the fullest measure, yet it has cheated him. He did live on in Jones, his ghost did walk; his voice was heard in its authentic accents long after his death, his very gestures, his very clothes, the very texture of his mind continued in being. Yet it was mockery; and he, if he had known of it, would have been more poignantly aware that it was mockery than anyone. For what was living in him, in being immortalised, died. Jones spoke his words, and from Jones's mouth they emerged dead; his ideas rattled about in Jones's mind, making a hollow, empty sound; his spirit in its new tabernacle, Jones, turned to stone. Better no immortality at all than this. Better annihilation than still life. He knew, none better, the consequences of institutionalising a living gospel, how in the process all life departed from it and only a husk remained. He knew what fantastic edifices were built on credulity, and how cunningly egotism and self-interest intertwined with faith and reverence. Knowing this, he still chose Jones to receive his spirit, only realising his mistake shortly before he died, and then altering his will.

At the end of *Erewhon*, Higgs makes his escape in a balloon; and in *Erewhon Revisited* he returns to find that the exploit has formed the basis of a new religion called Sunchildism, and that hypocrisy, bogus scholarship, every sort of subterfuge have been employed to make of it a means whereby a few plausible rogues may continue to inflate their own importance and establish themselves in positions of privilege and authority. This was a subject after Butler's heart. He had been getting at it one way and another all his

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life; for, like Marx, he believed in social conspiracies—only in smaller, less comprehensive ones. Otherwise, how was he to explain his own cold-shouldering, whether he turned his attention to theology, science, business, art, music, literary criticism, scholarship or translation? As things turned out, precisely the same thing happened to Butler as happened to Higgs. He became a cult, a religion, whose High Priest was Jones. Out of his corpse grew Butlerism; and if he, like Higgs, could have seen it in all its glory he would have been, first as puzzled as Higgs was, and then as indignant. Restless egotism, insistent, fearful appetites, frustrated affection weaving itself into fantasies of love and hate, kept him lonely and unhappy, and brought him to a lonely, unhappy death; as soon as he was disposed of, Jones waxed fat on Butlerism as Hanky and Panky did on Sunchildism, grew sleek and content and prosperous, became an institution, infinitely benevolent and respectable and picturesque, part of the Establishment, against which, since it had refused to include him, Butler had spent his life railing. It is strange to hear the sharp accents of Butler's voice muffled and fogged in Jones's, to see the sharp outline of his personality blurred, made diffuse, imprecise, as Jones's assimilates it, and the evaporation of Butler's thought when it is transferred to the moist warmth of Jones's mind. No disciple could be falser while seeming most true. In the very appearance of truth lies the falsity.

Take, for instance, what happened at an interview Jones had with Miss May Butler soon after Butler's death and the account of this interview

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in the *Memoir*. Shaken by his friend's death he hastened to console Miss Butler. Yes, at the last, Sam believed in a hereafter: he closed his eyes trustfully—soothing her, quietening her. How nice Mr. Jones is! she thought. What a gentleman! What a Christian! After all, she had misjudged him. Sam was unworthy to have such a friend. She was touched. "Mr. Jones, oh, Mr. Jones, how your words have comforted me!"

"Mr. Jones," she wrote in a letter to her sister, Mrs. Bridges, "says that S. had a very real child-like practical belief in God. He often talked of God very simply and naturally . . . though in theory he did not formulate his belief, practically he often spoke in the simplest way. 'If I am trying to do right, or to do the best I know, God will make it right'—and expressions like that. . . . Mr. Jones says that he often spoke with the trust of a child . . . quite realised that he often attacked beliefs not held by thoughtful Christians, but long exploded. I said it was not so much the great things in life, but the tiny ones which often made one feel how certainly there must be a God who knew and cared for us. I told him about your cold stopping your going; and Dr. Lycett Burd being here when the telegram came; and Alfred's card coming just in time. He, Mr. Jones, said he had felt exactly the same, that in many little ways he had been led and guided just right without his will in those last days. I am sure that if not in the fullest sense a believer in Christian truth (*he* sees no difficulty in miracles)—Mr. Jones himself is very, very close to it."

This was all very well for the two old ladies—being very very close to Christian truth, seeing

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no difficulty in miracles, having been led and guided just right without his will in those latter days—but would not do at all for the *Memoir*. What was suitable for a pious maiden lady did not fit in with his rôle as Butler's lifelong friend and colleague, now his biographer and only authentic commentator. The heartbroken Jones, very, very close to Christian truth, who, for his part, unlike Butler, "sees no difficulty in miracles," had to give place to the droll, tolerant but still honest sceptic. "No, my dear lady, I'm sorry, but he didn't come round even when death leant over him to gather him up. Of course, from your point of view it's a pity; but then"—an expansive, droll gesture with his hand, a droll twinkle in his eye, patronising, tolerant benevolent—"after his seventh humbug of Christendom what can you expect?"

According to the *Memoir*, what happened when Jones saw Butler's sister was that "Miss Butler took me aside and talked about her brother, asking questions about his illness and death. And now perhaps he saw things more clearly than he had seen them during his life—perhaps he now understood his father better. She then asked me point-blank and rather suddenly whether he had not, after all, come to believe in immortality. I . . . could only say that her brother's opinion on that point had remained unaltered up to the last moment of his life. . . . I felt sorry for the poor woman, and cast about in my mind in search of some drop of comfort to offer her. All I could find to say was that when I left Sam a few hours before his death, promising to come and see him in the morning, he had replied that he did not suppose he would be there in the

morning. This, I suggested, might be taken to mean that he contemplated being somewhere else. She was not much impressed by my feeble bit of sophistry, and showed an inclination to continue talking about her own faith as though she had lost all interest in her brother's views. Presently we spoke of his last book, *Erewhon Revisited*, which she said she had not read. I understood her to say that, like her father, she had read none of her brother's books; and, again like her father, she saw nothing to be ashamed of in this. I said that I thought it a pity she should not have read, for instance, the passage in Chapter V of *Erewhon Revisited* when Mr. Higgs meets George and knows that he is his son, but George does not know that Mr. Higgs is his father, or that other beautiful passage in Chapter XXV when they part. 'No,' she said, 'no, I hate irony,' and she emphasised 'hate' with so much vicious determination that I saw it would be useless to tell her that these passages are free from any trace of irony. . . ."

So it goes on, in its laboured way trouncing Butler's sisters as Jones had often heard Butler trounce them, and as he used (not now) to trounce his own sister. He even thought it worth his while to ridicule at some length *A Kalendar for Lads* which Miss Butler compiled and sent to him, quoting from it and commenting on the probable authorship of its tags and verses in the drollest possible manner. These are flat-footed and sentimental enough. They bear comparison, however, with the "beautiful passage" in Chapter XXV of *Erewhon Revisited* when Higgs parts from George; only Jones is less charitable than Miss Butler and does not



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even allow of her verses, as she does of the "beautiful passage," that they might be ironical. "Be wise and wary," Higgs says to George, "bide your time, do what you prudently can, and you will find you can do much: try to do more, and you will do nothing. Be guided by the Mayor, by your mother—and by that dear old lady whose grandson you will——"

"Then they have told you," George interrupts, blushing scarlet.

Higgs replies: "My dearest boy, of course they have, and I have seen her, and am head over ears in love with her myself;" and George becomes "all smiles and blushes."

Later Higgs brings up the question of boots, which, for strategic reasons, he and George had previously exchanged. "I see you are not wearing my boots," he says. "I fear you did not find them comfortable, but I am glad you have not got them on, for I have set my heart on keeping yours."

"Let us settle about the boots first," George replies. "I rather fancied that that was why you put me off when I wanted to get my own back again: and then I thought I should like yours for a keepsake, so I put on another pair last night, and they are nothing like so comfortable as yours were."

Recounting this episode to his other son, Higgs says: "Now I wonder whether this was true, or whether it was only that dear fellow's pretty invention; but true or false I was as delighted as he meant me to be." On his deathbed he insists on having the boots put where he can see them from his bed, and dies feasting his eyes upon them. Irony is kindly so applied to such a scene.

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By comparison with his handling of *A Kalendar for Lads*, Jones was merciful, at least in the *Memoir*, towards his sister Lil's literary efforts. Some idea of their character may be got from a letter Butler wrote to Miss Jones about them—"There is Mrs. Waley's wig, there are the brother's debts, there is the parrot, and surely poor Jones may in the end be revenged—might he not even sell the parrot, cage and all? . . . At present some of your incidents—as, for example, the brother's debts and the quarrel between the lovers—suggest mechanical arrangement." It is scarcely more promising than *A Kalendar for Lads*.

The other member of Butler's household, Mr. Alfred Emery Cathie, is still alive. I met him several times, and had the pleasure of going on a day's excursion to Cambridge with him. He lives in one of the remoter London suburbs, and wears a somewhat formal collar and shirt-front, boots and the sort of suit that suggests an old-fashioned firm of family solicitors. As soon as he had let me in, and we were seated in his front room, the conversation took a distinctly Butlerian turn. "What," Mr. Cathie asked, "about remuneration?" I must admit the question took me aback a little. It invited precision; and remuneration is a subject about which only rich men care to be precise, and they not always. After a certain amount of temporising, I ventured to suggest five pounds down and another five pounds later, and Mr. Cathie closed with the offer. I got the feeling that his insistence on remuneration was more a matter of principle than greed. It reminded me somewhat of the

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Musical Banks in *Erewhon*, only the other way round, as though living with Butler and keeping his accounts had so implanted respect for money in him that he felt bound to genuflect in front of it whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Mr. Cathie carried about with him a flavour of the Clifford's Inn establishment. He had a way of lingering over a handshake that took me very close to Butler and Jones. The accuracy of his memory and addition and the precision of his handwriting were remarkable; and he told me that he still occasionally took a day's carefully planned outing, say to Margate and back by steamer. After Butler's death, Jones employed him at thirty shillings a week, which was half what Butler had been paying him; then after two years sacked him. The *Memoir* characteristically describes the episode thus: "For some months after my sister and I had moved to Maida Vale Alfred came there daily just as he used to go to Clifford's Inn; but presently he made up his mind to start in business, and, in the spring of 1905, bought a small general shop in Canal Road, Mile End."

Another trait in Mr. Cathie that evoked the Clifford's Inn establishment was his way of expecting to be laughed at. Like a comedian, he left pauses for laughter. Not that he was unduly given to cracking jokes or telling funny stories. It was simply that he had grown accustomed to being regarded as an oddity. He had a way, too, of leaning very near the person he was talking to and speaking confidentially in his ear. "My dear boy," he would say: "my dear boy," and there was Hans Faesch, "our dear little man," "our dear little fellow," the prayer-

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book-full of blessings, and the locket with Hans's hair that Butler and Jones wore on their watch-chains, that Jones gave to Miss Rabe when Hans was affianced to her and Mother threw in her blessing, Butler offering to share his with Jones turn and turn about.

He liked talking about Butler, for whom he obviously had a deep and sincere affection, and showing his relics—Butler's clock, easy-chair, soap-dish even. Of Jones he had nothing good to say. "He was always crying," he said contemptuously: "always crying. The Governor would excuse him by saying: 'Alfred, he's Welsh!'"

He described how Jones began to drop Butler when he came into his mother's money—"The Governor held him up like that," he said, making the motions of supporting someone too feeble to stand alone; "and when he could stand on his own feet, he didn't want him any more. Every month I used to make out their cheques—his and Pauli's—sixteen, thirteen, four each"—and how, when he went to fetch Butler home from Naples to die, Butler was particularly insistent that he should not communicate with Jones, even though he was at Ancona.

His attitude to the *Memoir* was critical. "All about Jones," he said, "and such lies, and then letting them publish all that about Mrs. Boss! The Governor wrote those things down without ever meaning them to be published, just to amuse his cousin Reginald Worsley."

The collection of sayings attributed to Mrs. Boss, Reginald Worsley's laundress, that Mr. Cathie here referred to, was found amongst Butler's papers, and published as *Bossiana*. In

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an attached note Butler explained that it had "been a matter of some question with me whether I should allow the following pages to remain amongst my papers or not; but after consultation with men in high position in the British Museum I have decided to retain them." The note also excused the apparent "brutality" of his cousin's manner of addressing Mrs. Boss: "I would assure the reader that my cousin is neither coarse nor brutal at all . . . and said many of the worst things he said simply to get the Mrs. Quickly-isms out of her, which could not have been obtained otherwise." The fact that Butler addressed this apologia to "the reader" suggests that Mr. Cathie may be mistaken in supposing that he would have disapproved of the publication of *Bossiana*. A fair specimen of the Mrs. Quickly-isms is: "It ain't your shawl, and they ain't your boots, and my name ain't Mrs. Snotty-arsed Bill." Their general level, despite the opinion of "men in high position in the British Museum," scarcely seems to warrant the violence Worsley did to himself to preserve them for posterity.

It is interesting to compare Butler's attitude towards *Bossiana* with his attitude towards *Shaviana*. "Talking of plays," he wrote in a letter to Jones, "Meo came to tea Wednesday and told me he had seen a play by Mr. Bernard Shaw—a private performance, a piece that would not be permitted to be done in public. If the play was anything like what Meo said it was, I cannot understand how a man who considered himself a gentleman should have chosen to be bothered with writing it." The play referred to is *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

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About Madame, Mr. Cathie said: "The Governor would go every Wednesday afternoon. 'Oh, bother, Alfred,' he'd say: 'it's Wednesday to-day, and I've got to go to Handel Street.' Jones went on Tuesdays. The Governor'd leave about two-thirty and be back by five, walking both ways."

"And Jones?" I asked eagerly, wondering whether he went earlier and stayed later.

Mr. Cathie did not know about Jones's habits in the matter.

"She was a fine woman," he went on: "dark, large, not a regular street-walker, but receiving gentlemen in her room. The Governor picked her up one evening Islington way. He and Jones paid her a pound a week each, including their holidays. When they were abroad I paid her. I took her out once or twice myself."

"She died," he said, "in March 1892, and was buried in the Roman Catholic cemetery at Kensal Green. The Governor and Jones and I went to the funeral."

The function, as he described it, was a melancholy affair—the three of them, and one other mourner, Madame's brother, watching her interment on a bleak March afternoon with rain falling steadily. She, too, went out, out, out into the night. According to Mr. Cathie, Butler never replaced her, though Jones did. It was the end, as far as Butler was concerned, of all traffic with women.

Mr. Cathie went on to explain that Pauli's lunches only lasted for three-quarters of an hour to an hour, but that he was never present at them. "Pauli was very stingy," he said. "Once, just before Christmas, he gave the Governor's laun-



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dress half-a-crown for a Christmas box; and once he gave me an old broken tie-pin, which he said he thought perhaps I might get repaired, but it was past repairing, so I sold it as old gold for two or three shillings. These were the only times as far as I know that he ever gave anything away."

"What sort of man was he?" I asked.

"Of course, he took the Governor in shocking. I knew all the time that he was a wrong 'un; I told the Governor how I saw him come out of a Club in Pall Mall and get into a cab, but Butler only said he'd probably been visiting someone. He seemed to be afraid of him, never to be able to bring himself to hurt his feelings." Mr. Cathie's voice softened: "All the same he was a perfect gentleman."

Just before we parted, Mr. Cathie said: "There's one man I didn't care for—now what's his name?—I've got it. Bernard Shaw." (He accentuated the second syllable of Mr. Shaw's Christian name.) "I didn't care for the way he spoke at the Erewhon Dinner. Not at all. And the Governor didn't care for him either. 'He's a beast,' he said when he came back from seeing him: 'He's a beast!'" Mr. Cathie chuckled.

Mr. Cathie's position in the Clifford's Inn household was a peculiar one. Butler described him, in a letter to Faesch, as being "half son, half nurse, always very dear friend and playmate rather than work-fellow—in fact he is and has been for the last ten years my right hand." In his eyes he was in the same category as Mr. Shaw, the tinker, of *The Way of All Flesh*—simple, unspoilt, a constant source of entertain-

ment to sophisticated, educated persons like Jones and himself, one whose native wit, though illiterately expressed, often put to shame the wisdom of "you Oxford and Cambridge gentlemen who think you have examined everything." He was a representative of an inferior order, and therefore interesting as a means of studying the inferior order's ways and attitude of mind, faithful and always respectful, knowing his place, so that it was safe to be kind, even familiar with him. Scorned and rejected by his equals, Butler felt that simple souls like Mr. Cathie knew his worth. What was hidden from the wise and the worldly was revealed unto babes and sucklings, unto Mr. Cathie.

As Wordsworth found comfort in the burble of brooks and the song of birds because they reminded him that at the source life bubbled up pure and undefiled, so did Butler find comfort in Mr. Cathie; and as philanthropists preach the blessedness of simplicity of life and thought, and devotedly give themselves to the task of educating and generally improving the lot of those whom, in that they are uneducated and poor, they insist are their superiors, so did Butler devotedly give himself to the task of educating and improving Mr. Cathie. He took him on the Continent to broaden his outlook and to the British Museum to improve his mind; taught him music and to keep accounts by double entry; started a savings account for him and contributed to it; then (apart from keeping accounts by double entry, and the savings account, which were important) was rather glad that he preferred reading *Tit-Bits* to looking at picture-galleries, and made no progress at learn-

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ing to play the piano. Mr. Cathie was his Natural Man, or proletarian Nice Person, and he was delighted when his first child was born five months after his marriage, noting down the daring opinion that "I don't think it very much matters provided mother and infant do well," and making jokes to Jones about five months' babies.

Butler was very much annoyed about a description of himself that appeared in a book called *What's What* by Harry Quilter, the Editor of *The Universal Review*, in which he had once written a number of articles. He was particularly annoyed with the closing paragraph, which ran: "He lived when we first knew him, and probably does still, the queerest hermit-like life in an old Inn of Court attended only by a boy called Alfred who was at once servant, friend and butt for his master's good-humoured pleasantries." Mr. Cathie, Butler argued in reply, was not a boy, but a man—twenty-three when he entered his service in January, 1887, and getting on for forty when *What's What* was published—and though "it is quite true that Alfred was almost from the very day he came to me at once servant and friend, that he was ever a butt for any pleasantries on my part I utterly deny. I began to feel almost immediately that I was like a basket that had been entrusted to a dog. I had Alfred in mind when I used this simile in *Erewhon Revisited*. He liked to have someone who appreciated him, and whom he could run and keep straight. I was so much older, that to him I was a poor old thing with one foot in the grave, who but for his watchful eye and sustaining hand might tumble into it at any moment." Nevertheless, there is some

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truth in Quilter's description of Mr. Cathie's position. Butler certainly never made fun of him; at the same time, both he and Jones translated him, in the *Punch* or Barrie sense, into a funny character, whose rôle was to act as a foil to the correctness of his patrons, to acquire a humorous ascendancy over them, to play up to them, thereby creating an atmosphere of tender burlesque, to give them an opportunity every now and again of stressing their superiority by shaking their heads and thinking: After all, he's wiser than we are, with all our learning. Butler made a note to the effect that he was "prouder of having received and treasured these scraps of Alfred's than I am of all my books put together."

He was a great believer in class distinctions. Part of Ernest Pontifex's conversion consisted in realising that the poor were not as likeable as the rich, and that an unbridgeable gulf existed between the propertied and educated and the penurious and uneducated. At the same time, Butler divided the latter into two categories—those who, like Badcock and Thersites, were envious of whoever was rich and good-looking and successful, whose object was to stir up trouble, to put down the mighty from their seats and exalt the humble and meek, and those who, like Mr. Cathie and Mrs. Boss, accepted their lot as being in the natural order of things, looked up to their betters, to Butler and Jones, and, in their simple, unconscious way, were both amusing and penetrating. The restless poor Butler detested. He always portrayed them as physically repulsive—"ugly, dirty, ill-dressed, bumptious"—and as eating out their hearts with

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envy and ineffectual spite. If it became a question, he wrote in a letter to an old New Zealand friend, of putting down the mighty from their seats and exalting the humble and meek, then his sympathies were with the mighty, for the very excellent reason that "the humble and meek do get so confoundedly cocky in such a little time that it is much as though the mighty had not been put down at all." The other sort of poor, the contented sort, he tended to idealise. He liked their company. Being with them gave him a feeling of superiority which he translated into a patronising, sentimental recognition of their charm and sterling qualities. Also, he clung to the illusion that they at least were on his side when all the others were joined in a conspiracy to suppress him. "I maintain that 'men of science,'" he wrote in an appendix to *Evolution, Old and New*, "were, and still are, very ignorant concerning the history of Evolution; but whether they were or were not, I did not write *Evolution, Old and New* for them; I wrote for the general public, who have been kind enough to testify their appreciation of it in a sufficiently practical manner;" and, further on: "The support given me by the general public" was sufficient proof "that I have not written in vain." According to Butler's analysis of the sales of his books, *Evolution, Old and New* had sold up to November 28, 1899, 541 copies. It is like the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. In order to hearten himself, he needed the company of someone who symbolised this imaginary appreciative general public, and Mr. Cathie was such a person. "After all," Mr. Cathie said to me once assertively, "the Governor won against

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Darwin: oh yes, he won all right. Ask anybody if he didn't."

I asked him to oblige me with his considered opinion about the characters of Jones and of Pauli. He said he would turn the matter over in his mind, and the next day I received by post from him two little strips of paper on which were written in his careful handwriting:

*Henry Festing Jones*

Rather a self-conscious, pompous and inconsiderate person.

*Charles Paine Pauli*

A vain, conceited, mysterious and very unapproachable person.



## V

### RIGHT FROM WRONG

"I knew that Pauli had a dumb devil and pitied him; but I did not yet realise that a dumb devil is the worst that can take possession of any man."—*Charles Paine Pauli*, 1889.

MISS SAVAGE was a fellow art-student with Butler at Heatherley's School of Art. They met when he came back from New Zealand, saw each other occasionally and corresponded regularly until her death in 1885. Of the persons with whom he was intimate, she was the most likeable. She first became fond of Butler when she saw him walking along the street eating cherries from a basket; without stopping or saying anything, he passed her the basket; also without saying anything, she took a handful of cherries, and passed on. His rapt appreciation of the cherries, and his almost unconscious impulse to share his happiness appealed to her. She remembered the incident, and wrote of it years afterwards in a letter to Butler—"One day when I was going to the gallery, a very hot day I remember, I met you on the shady side of Berners Street, eating cherries out of a basket. . . . You were perfectly silent with content, and you handed the basket to me as I was passing, without saying a word. I pulled out a handful, and went on my way rejoicing without saying a word either. I had not before perceived you to be different from anybody else. I was like Peter

Bell and the primrose with the yellow brim. As I went to France a day or so after that, and did not see you again for months, the recollection of you as you were eating cherries in Berners Street abode with me, and pleased me greatly." It was a happy memory. After this Miss Savage identified the window of Butler's room in Clifford's Inn, and always looked up at it when she passed that way. Once she saw Butler in the window.

She had been a governess, was lame and had a tart, feminine wit. Some of the wittiest things in Butler's writing originated with her. She was devoted to Butler, recognised his genius before anyone else did, read all his manuscripts and gave him advice about altering them which he nearly always took. It was she who pressed him to write a novel, detecting in *The Fair Haven's* introductory memoir a great power of characterisation. Darwin, too, detected the same gift; "what has struck me much in your book (*The Fair Haven*) is your dramatic power—that is to say, the way in which you earnestly and thoroughly assume the character and think the thoughts of the man you pretend to be. Hence I conclude you could write a really good novel."

It is obvious that she loved him. Her tenderness comes out in a hundred little ways. Up to a point Butler appreciated her affection and the charm of her letters; but, being himself, he could not just let it be—an unattractive, intelligent woman with an exquisite nature and a quick wit enjoying his company. He could not, as he did with the cherries, just give her a handful of himself, as much as he thought fit to spare, and pass on. His first, inevitable reaction to her

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love was fear. If he let her knit him socks and make him kettle-holders, come and see him and develop their intimacy, he would deliver himself into her hands. She would have some claim upon him. He would have to pay her, as he did Pauli and Jones and Madame. At last she might claim his body, so that he found himself standing naked and defenceless before her. As he brooded on this, the conviction grew that she was burning with desire for him. "I wish," she wrote to him once, "you did not know right from wrong." Editing her correspondence after her death, he wept long over this. Poor soul, he thought, if she had only known! It was not morality, a sense of right and wrong which kept me from "requitting her affection for me in the only way that would have satisfied her." He was so moved that he wrote three sonnets on the subject. Jones included two of them in the *Memoir*. This is the third—

Had I been some young sailor, continent  
Perforce three weeks and then well plied with wine,  
I might in time have tried to yield consent  
And almost (though I doubt it) made her mine.  
Or had it been but once and never again,  
Come what might, she should have had her way;  
But yielding once were yielding twice, and then  
I had been hers for ever and a day.  
Or had she only been content to crave  
A marriage of true minds, her wish was granted:  
My mind was hers, I was her willing slave  
In all things else except the one she wanted:  
And here, alas! at any rate to me  
She was an all too, too impossible she.

Miss Savage was not merely plain, but ugly and shabby and an invalid. Jones found her appearance "a shock and a disappointment,"

even though he had not expected "another Isabella." There was about her, he writes, "that kind of dowdiness which I used to associate with ladies who had been at school with my mother." She was not, in fact, a Nice Person. If she had been a Nice Person, Butler thought, she would not have loved him. It was only because, he thought, no Nice Person would accept her love that she fell back on loving him. "Who, I wonder, was it," he noted on a letter of Miss Savage's telling him facetiously that she intended to drop his acquaintance "if you become surrounded by a circle of adoring spinsters (of which I see symptoms)"—"who, I wonder, was it that was doing her utmost so to surround me, and boring me almost beyond endurance, in spite of all my admiration, respect, gratitude. . . . If ever man gave woman her answer unequivocally and at the beginning, I gave mine to Miss Savage—but it was no use. She would not be checked and I had not either the heart to check her—or—well, never mind. I would if I could, but I could not. And to this day she daily haunts me that I could not."

Her gay letters, written on little scraps of paper, are somehow pathetic. One from Pauli, even though it only acknowledged the receipt of a cheque, gave Butler a greater thrill. He tossed her letters impatiently aside, unless they were about a manuscript he had sent her; scarcely in the ordinary way had patience to read them through, yet kept them, built them into the monument he was preparing to enshrine his posthumous fame. After all, they were about him. He liked her jokes, especially when, as he often did, he could work them into his

writing; he liked her flattery and appreciation of his work, and in return for this was prepared to let her pay him a visit occasionally, telling her very particularly not to come before such a time, making it clear when he wanted her to go; but the fineness of her nature was beyond his perception, until after her death, when he brooded on his selfishness and obtuseness in writing about his own ailments when hers were so much worse, although she said nothing about them, on her self-abnegation and courageous cheerfulness. Alive, he found her presents of hand-made kettle-holders irritating: dead, he hung the kettle-holders over his mantel-piece as a sacred relic, fixing his eyes on them as Higgs did on his son George's boots. What he never appreciated in her, alive or dead, was that she alone sensed and venerated the real greatness in him, found the genius beneath the prig, a suffering bewildered soul beneath a pattern for living. "Towneley," she wrote to him, "is a coarse creature with vicious propensities. . . . Ernest gets *tant soit peu* priggish—in fact, very much so—towards the end, and especially in the treatment of his children, which is ultra-priggish."

This would have been blasphemy in Jones; there were "beautiful passages" in the account of Ernest's smug farming out of his children with a bargee, worse even than Rousseau's depositing his with the *enfants trouvés*, since Rousseau was at least actuated by stinginess, whereas Ernest and Overton really believe they have done the best possible thing—"Come here, Jack, my boy," said Ernest, "here's a shilling for you." The boy blushed and could hardly be got to come in spite of our previous blandishments; he had

had pennies given him before, but shillings never. His father caught him good-naturedly by the ear and lugged him to us.

" 'He's a good boy, Jack is,' said Ernest to Mr. Rollings, 'I'm sure of that.'

" 'Yes,' said Mr. Rollings, 'he's a werry good boy, only that I can't get him to learn his reading and writing. He don't like going to school, that's the only complaint against him. I don't know what's the matter with all my children; and yours, Mr. Pontifex, is just as bad, but they none of them likes book-learning, though they learn anything else fast enough. Why, as for Jack here, he's almost as good a bargeman as I am!' And he looked fondly and patronisingly towards his offspring.

" 'I think,' said Ernest to Mr. Rollings, 'if he wants to marry Alice when he gets older he had better do so, and he shall have as many barges as he likes. In the meantime, Mr. Rollings, say in what way money can be of use to you, and whatever you can make useful is at your disposal.' "

From Miss Savage Butler meekly accepted the rebuke about Ernest's priggishness. "I have no doubt," he replied, "Ernest becomes priggish, for, as I have told you, I am very priggish myself; everyone is more or less."

Ernest's Aunt Alethea, who bequeathed him her money, is Butler's idealisation of Miss Savage. Overton, the mature Butler, is in love with her; "each time I saw her I admired her more and more, as the best, kindest, wittiest, most lovable, and, to my mind, handsomest woman whom I had ever seen." Jones comments on this: "Except for the words 'lovable' and 'hand-



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somest,' this accurately conveys Butler's idea of Miss Savage; and the word 'lovable' may be allowed to stand if it be understood as one would use it in speaking of an aunt or sister, but if as one would use it in speaking of the love which leads to marriage between man and woman, it is as inapplicable to Miss Savage as the other word 'handsomest.' " Given Jones's and Butler's attitude towards their aunts and sisters, Jones's commentary on the significance of 'lovable' scarcely helps.

. . . . .

Miss Savage ran women's clubs, and for a time a ladies' art-gallery. She had been connected with charities and public-spirited endeavour. All her associations were feminist—high-waisted skirt, shirt blouse, pince-nez with a black ribbon, hair piled on top of the head. Her bedroom was full of litter, of little boxes and bottles and scraps of paper; and she had cancer—an external cancer, so that she knew she had it. Like Butler, she hated that to which she belonged. This was the link between them, the essential sympathy. She, too, resented belonging to a way of life she detested. Her flesh, like Butler's, mocked her spirit. Like him, she looked up wistfully at happy, lovely, unself-conscious people, whose eyes were bright and whose skin was smooth and clear; who were indifferent about the rights of women, and consumed their lives with the same blitheness that Butler consumed cherries from a bag. Only she had more courage than Butler. She could love without paying, be spiteful without hating, even take delight in the clothes that hid her cancer. Several came to

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her funeral, but who was there to come to Butler's, except himself in others?

Butler was the great episode in her life. She knew him for what he was; did not, like Jones, merge herself in him; loved and admired him; wanted him to realise fully the genius she knew he had. The distortion was all on his side. She loved gaily and sincerely, without ever having to suppose that he burnt with lust or sickened with repulsion when he saw her, or that, she being what she was, he must be thus and thus, then making him thus and thus, and growing to hate his company because he was so palpably not thus and thus.

She dressed carefully to go and see him. It was an adventure, and made her heart beat fast. She dressed carefully, pinning things in place, arranging her hair. The result was dowdy, but dowdy only in the sense that the "beautiful passages" in *Erewhon Revisited* are beautiful. From Goodge Street to Clifford's Inn she stumbled along, leaning on her stick with its heavy rubber end, her face strained somewhat because of her infirmity. As she stumbled along she stored up things to say to Butler that she knew he would like—the mammon of righteousness, combining the wisdom of the dove with the harmlessness of the serpent, Gladstone's lack of a single redeeming vice, buying a dictionary to read *Daniel Deronda* in the original—sayings that she would bring out with a gay, venomous tightening of her mouth, or jot down on scraps of paper and send him. She looked in shop-windows, and at hoardings, head on one side and eyes quick, like a squirrel taking stock between darting down one tree-trunk and up another.

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Knocking at Butler's door, she heard him rush for his coat. One day, she thought, he'll break his arms if he puts it on so frenziedly. He opened to her, and put on a kettle to make tea. She looked round the room, so neatly untidy, so miscellaneous and utilitarian, more like an office or a workshop than a living-room. The room pleased her because it was him. No other room would be right, she thought. He would sit ill in any other room. Seeing him use an old newspaper to take the kettle off the fire, she decided to make him a kettle-holder. Otherwise she had no wish to interfere.

They sat on either side of the fire, flames leaping up, evening coming on. Butler told her what he had been doing, about his pictures, the ones he was sending to the Academy, and about the music he and Jones were writing; fetched a manuscript and read aloud. She was attentive and appreciative. Of course his pictures would be accepted; of course his new book would be a success despite the machinations of the Darwin clique. Her appreciation and encouragement soothed him. He sat peacefully there, talking about his work and his health, which was not very good—a buzzing in his ears, difficulty in breathing, headaches if he read or painted for more than an hour or so. She told him he had been overworking, and that he should do nothing for a week or so, not contrasting his minor ailments with her cancer. Because she loved him she was forgetful of herself. This was what Butler could never be; and as he could never be forgetful of himself love always tormented him, like a fly persistently settling.

He looked sideways at her and remembered.

Tranquillity went because he remembered that she was lame and dowdy and poor and unattractive, his own sort. Why does she come here and bore me? he thought bitterly. Why suffer her to bore me? His spirit distorted. She should have been lovely and lovable, with £70,000 like Alethea Pontifex; she should have had clamorous lovers and preferred him to all of them, he asking her from time to time to marry him, as Overton did Alethea, but in such a way that she always laughingly refused, their understanding perfect. Love that passeth the love of woman, plus the love of woman, plus £70,000; the Church and Free Thought; God and no God and any God.

Now he looked bitterly at her. Soon she would go, and he be able to get on with his work. Soon she would stumble away in her dowdy clothes, hobbling along with her stick to save omnibus fares, perhaps not having it. Their conversation halted, and she got up sadly. Of course sad, he thought, because she wants that which I cannot give. "Had I been some young sailor continent perforce three months, and then well primed with wine. . . ." His vision (he lived on visions) altered. Her body was on fire, her mouth dry, her hands trembling with desire, eyes misty. "No, no," he said to himself, laughingly, as Ernest, got up regardless, put out his hand and laughingly told Theobald that it was all paid for—"no, no; I would if I could, but I can't." It gave him a sense of power. She was suffering as he suffered with Pauli. He became patronising, told her that perhaps if the weather was not particularly fine, and if his health allowed, and if she was quite sure he

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wouldn't meet unpleasant people such as her father and mother, he would look in to see her one of these days. Meanwhile he'd got a few reviews of *Life and Habit* to show her, this one written by this man who was a toady of Darwin's, this other by such a person with such and such reasons for wanting to damage him. She took the reviews gratefully, and promised to send them back. He saw her to the door, and listened as she went laboriously down the winding stairway, then, glad that she had gone, returned to his work.

Letters were all he really wanted of her. Her physical presence distressed him, whereas her letters made it possible to identify her with Alethea, to forget her shrivelled skin, and poverty, and unequal legs, and painful movements. He treasured her letters even when he did not read them. Then a scruple came. People reading them after his death might imagine things. Phrases in the letters might be twisted into signifying that he, Samuel Butler, who preached health and wealth, or, as he preferred to call it, grace, as the ultimate good, loved a shabby cripple, a frequenter of dingy women's clubs, of no consequence, poor and unhealthy and ugly. He decided to burn Miss Savage's letters, and wrote to tell her of his decision. Later he altered his mind and started keeping them again, thinking that, after all, his correspondence with her was so innocuous that there was really no danger of anyone putting a wrong interpretation on it. In any case, her letters were well written and full of sincere admiration for him and his work, and might sometime or other be purged of anything which might seem to imply a special

regard for her on his part, and published. It seemed to him, too, that since he had told her he was burning her letters there had been a certain falling off in their quality, as though she thought it scarcely worth while to bother with them when they were not being kept. To his surprise, however, he found that, far from his assurance that he was again keeping her letters leading to their improvement, she almost stopped writing to him at all. "I fear," he wrote to her, "I have frightened you from writing as frequently as you once did, by telling you, as I did not long since, that I kept your letters. You were once some years ago decidedly hurt with me when I told you I had burned your letters. Your letters are by far the best I ever read, much less received; how I could ever have burnt one of them I cannot conceive, but, alas! I did. Perhaps it is because I have lost them that I imagine that they were written with greater care than any that I have received since, but now that I have told you I keep them you hardly write at all. I will compromise. I will keep your letters, but put them together and address them to yourself, so that on my death they may be returned to you."

Miss Savage headed her reply: "With care! This side up." "It must be confessed," she wrote, "that I am a most unreasonable person. What! I leave off writing 'with care' when I hear that you don't keep my letters, and I don't write at all when you tell me that you do! Well, it only shows that I am a true Erewhonian, and have studied in the schools to good purpose. But you are mistaken when you talk about my being hurt when you told me you burned my



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letters. On the contrary, I felt relieved, and I am sure you can have only a very hazy recollection of the matter or you would not have recalled a very unpleasant moment of my existence. And now, my dear Mr. Butler, let me give you a little good advice. If you wish to make yourself agreeable to the female sex, never hint to a woman that she writes, or has written 'with care.' Nothing enrages her so much, and it is only the exceptional sweetness of my disposition that enables me, with some effort I confess, to forgive this little blunder on your part. As a matter of fact, I don't care what becomes of my letters. Keep them, or burn them as you please, only for goodness sake don't label them to be returned to me at your death. If you do, I shall never write to you without thinking of your death, and that I cannot bear to think of. Besides you assume that I shall live the longest, which is flattering to my vital forces; but suppose I die first? What will become of my letters then? Pray let every contingency be prepared for and provided against while we are arranging the matter."

Butler did not understand the reference to "a very unpleasant moment of my existence"; "I remember nothing," he noted on the letter, "but telling her that I burned her letters. There must have been something that led up to this, which pained her in a manner that I did not perceive. I have no recollection beyond the mere fact of saying that I burned her letters."

. . . . .

Like his other intimacies, this one found a sort of equilibrium, became static after a while.

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It was so with Madame, Pauli, Jones, with his father even at last. He wrote to Miss Savage the shortest and smallest number of letters that were compatible with her continuing to write to him; he saw her as rarely as possible, because "she oppressed me with her very brilliancy—nay, bored me—for there is no bore like a brilliant bore. She rarely left my rooms without my neck swelling and my head being all wrong, from the effort it cost me to conceal the fact she had been too much for me." His ailments, his quarrels and his hints that his father might soon die, formed the refrain of all his letters to her—"I am better: my new cold is nearly gone, and the old one caught last January is beginning to show through like old dirty snow when the new has been melted from the top of it—but I am really in all respects much better, and my breathing is nearly well"; "The review in the *Academy* is by Douglas Freshfield; he is a poor creature, and considering that he is rich, and has written a book about Italian valleys himself, I think he might have held his tongue; I daresay I shall find a little something for him some day;" "The Darwin literary and scientific clique have done their utmost; they have no more cards to play, all that they can say or do is now done;" "My father hangs on in as nearly as possible the same state as when I wrote ten days ago. He is still not despaired of—on the whole I should say—well, I really cannot say which way I think most likely;" "My father remains much in *statu quo*. He comes down about 10 and keeps entirely to the house. Remains weak, and is never, I should think, likely to recover fully, but may hang on

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for months, or go off with the N.E. winds which we are sure to get later on."

He sniffed the wind eagerly for a chill in it, eagerly scanned the deaths in the *Times* to learn whether the winter was carrying off other elderly clergymen, wrote to Miss Savage from Shrewsbury, where his father retired after leaving Langar: "I was telegraphed for yesterday, and came down here to find my father desperately ill with bronchitis. He may rally, but the doctor does not think it likely. I am *very* sorry for him, but happily he is half unconscious and does not, they say, suffer." Miss Savage answered understandingly: "I was distressed to receive your letter last night, for I know exactly what you must be feeling." It was a false alarm. Butler kicked his heels outside his father's bedroom for a fortnight, occasionally going in to see him, peering, with what tremulous anxiety! at his face, no son's love more anxious than his hate, listening to his breathing, looking up "bronchitis" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to see the normal course of the disease and the chances of its proving fatal. "I take it fairly philosophically," he wrote to Miss Savage, "but I don't believe it's good for me—at any rate unless in the end bronchitis proves to be really fatal sometimes." Finally, "my sister got the doctor to get me away this morning during a rally which may be permanent or not, and I had to go at a moment's notice." His sister's wish to rid her father of so macabre an attendant is comprehensible enough, though it was a grievance with Butler. He returned to London in the mood of a parliamentary candidate who has been defeated by a narrow majority.

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This was in 1883. He had to make several more journeys to Shrewsbury before he was able finally to lay hands on his father's money. Canon Butler died on December 29, 1886. On that occasion, having learnt all about bronchitis that there was to learn from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he employed himself in writing his father's obituary notice; it "takes me all my time, for it requires careful writing, and I must do it before my father dies if I am to get it done at all—some two or three columns." Then, at last, the happy day! "My father died at 5.35," he wrote to Jones. "I have a small carbuncle which has made me lame in the groin for the moment, so I cannot telegraph or I would. At any rate you will know to-morrow morning." "This is a very exciting day," Jones replied the next day, when Canon Butler's will was going to be read, "and I suppose I shall hear from you to-morrow how you are situated." He, too, was excited.

Canon Butler died in the evening. Shortly before he died, Butler came into his bedroom, and one of the nurses whispered: "Mr. Sam has arrived, Sir; he will come up and see you directly." Butler came awkwardly, even a little sheepishly, into the bedroom. The scene was not to his taste. When the nurse spoke to him, Canon Butler opened his eyes, Butler says, with a scared look (Pauli also died, he liked to think, with a scared look in his eyes because of him), and said: "Oh, then he'll tell us how long it will be before we shall all have to turn out." "I was there," Butler wrote, "but he did not see me. To him I was a disturbing influence which could neither be quite reckoned with nor quite got rid

of, but which must be abated as far as possible." He supported his father's head between his hands as he died, looking down at his face, all unconscious between his hands. Looking down at his face, noting how "carefully he was nursed, how absolutely free he was from mental pain, and how in all ways gently he was passing away, I said to my cousin, 'How gently do those that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!'" Butler also had riches when he died—"Have you brought the cheque-book, Alfred?" he asked anxiously, and Alfred had—yet he did not enter gently into the Kingdom of Heaven.

There was, at his father's deathbed, no contrition. He had waited too long for the event to be melted by it, just held his father's head in his hands, and thought bitterly how quietly and peacefully he was dying. Why, he asked himself, did he come to be able, after such a life, to be able to die quietly and peacefully?—because he had riches. It was a final confirmation of his faith. At his mother's deathbed he could be contrite, she having no riches, either to ease her way to Heaven, or to bequeath to him. His mother died at Mentone in 1873. "My mother," he wrote to Miss Savage, "is ill—very ill. It is not likely that she will recover.—"

"I had rather  
It had been my father."

He went on to explain that he was glad he had not been summoned to see her, "for though in such a case I should travel, yet the less I am on my feet the better—I ought to keep them up." "What pains me," he added, "is that I cannot begin to regain the affection now

which, alas! I have long ceased to feel." At the same time he wrote to his sister May: "My father's and your joint letter reached me this morning, and I am deeply grieved at the desponding tone of my father's half. In spite of the more cheerful tone of your portion of the letter, and of the report of the medical men, I cannot help being thoroughly anxious and alarmed. I rack my brains in vain to think of anything which I could do towards alleviating pain, the account of which is most distressing to me. Alas! I can do nothing. I can understand your wishing to remain alone together as long as it is possible to do so, but I trust that you will not allow any immediate danger to arise without sending for me at once. I could not think of myself as going about my daily affairs and my mother lying perhaps at the point of death, without a sight of the one whom I am very sure that she loves not the least of her children. It would be intolerable to me to think of this, yet I know and deeply regret that my presence could not be without its embarrassment. However, you must judge for yourselves, and I trust that the necessity may not arise. I am still a close prisoner, closer than ever; fortunately still well, and still painless, and not threatened with any serious complications, nevertheless a troublesome and serious complication has arisen, which I cannot enter into more than to say it is utterly unimportant except in so far as it keeps me a prisoner. But what is this in comparison with what you must yourselves be witnessing! I find nothing so depressing to myself as the sight of suffering in others; but how much more so when the sufferer is the



one whom one would naturally most desire to save from suffering. You will say: Then why have you written *Erewhon*? The mistake was in not keeping it more quiet, and then in thinking that the very great success which the book has met with could make my father and mother proud of my having written it. I suppose you know that *The Coming Race*—the book which *Erewhon* was allowed to have equalled, if not more, was by Lord Lytton! I thought my father and mother would be proud of my having met with the approbation of the most intelligent classes of my countrymen, and that not in half measure, but in whole measure. I am sorry I was mistaken. But had I known that my mother's health was failing at the time, I would have kept it back. Whatever else I do, I will do my utmost to do without it reaching the ears of those whom it will pain; but I cannot hold my tongue."

In the end he did go to Mentone. The scene there is reproduced in *The Way of All Flesh*—"The poor woman raised herself in bed as he came towards her, and weeping as she flung her arms round him cried: 'Oh, I knew he would come, I knew. I knew he would come.' Ernest broke down and wept as he had not done for years. 'Oh, my boy, my boy,' she said as soon as she could recover her voice, 'have you never really been near us for all these years? Ah, you do not know how we have loved you and mourned over you, papa just as much as I have. . . .' How cruel, how infamously unfeeling Ernest thought he had been! 'Mother,' he said, 'forgive me, the fault was mine. I ought not to have been so hard: I was wrong, very wrong.' The poor blubbing fellow meant what he said,

and his heart yearned to his mother as he had never thought it could yearn again.

“ ‘But have you never,’ she continued, ‘come although it was in the dark and we did not know it—oh, let me think you have not been so cruel as we have thought you. Tell me that you came, if only to comfort me and make me happier.’ ‘I had no money to come with, mother, until lately.’ ”

So Butler’s two greatest enemies were removed from the scene. Their removal did not impede his hate. He went eagerly through his father’s papers for incriminating documents, seeking evidence of the fact that it had always been his deepest concern “to be against me . . . to see the bad side rather than the good of everything I said and did”; he returned with renewed zest to his novel, able, now that there was no chance of his being disinherited, to give free rein to his self-pity and bitter resentment against the two who were, he thought, responsible for all his misery; he re-inserted in *Erewhon* the “trial of a young man for having been so inexperienced as to part with a valuable property to his guardian for an insufficient sum without independent professional advice” that Pauli had persuaded him to omit from the first edition for fear of offending Canon Butler. His two sisters remained alive; and he continued to write occasionally to them, especially when he met any distinguished person, or when his work received favourable notice in religious publications, eager to show them that the attributing of *Erewhon*’s authorship to Lord Lytton, and its approval by “the most intelligent classes of my countrymen,” was not a mere flash in the pan.

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Miss Savage did not live to see Butler's glory in the death of his father. Butler regretted this. "When the money anxiety was removed by the death of my father at a time when ruin was staring me in the face," he noted on one of her letters, "I picked up in three or four months. I often grieve to think that the last few years of Miss Savage's life were those of my own deepest depression—oh! how I wish that she were living now and could see what I have done in the last few years!" To the very last moment she kept from him all knowledge of her disease, so that at its most virulent stage she was writing cheerfully, and he bemoaning his small ills. He heard suddenly, without any previous warning, from a third person that she had had to undergo a serious and painful operation. The last communication directly from her had been a post-card some two months before, written when she must have been suffering agonies of pain, and have known that her case was hopeless: "I write to inform you that I have made 12 kettle-holders for the Christian young, and they are to be sold at their bazaar, to-morrow, Wednesday and Thursday. I am *not* vindictive, but I wish you to know that I have made 12 Christian kettle-holders to be cast loose on society like the twelve apostles." On February 23, 1885, he heard that she was dead, though without riches, and though in terrible pain, entering gently into the Kingdom of Heaven; and five days later he attended her funeral—"She was buried Sat. Feb. 28, 1885, in the cemetery for the Parish of Marylebone, Finchley. . . . It was a lovely spring afternoon; during the whole time of the funeral birds were singing, and the sun was shining. . . .

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I felt that I was attending the funeral of incomparably the best and most brilliant woman that I had ever known. Happy she rarely was . . . I had already realised what till her death I doubt whether I had more than suspected—I mean how much better woman she was than I man—and how far fuller measure of good things she had meted out to me than I had meted to her in return. Therefore she haunts me, and always will haunt, because I never felt for her the love that if I had been a better man I should have felt. Granted that I had known her some three years before she (to use her own expression) ‘found me out,’ and that during those years she was at no pains to conceal her dislike for me. Granted that I had come to look upon her as an impossible person—that she was fully 36 before she changed her mind about me—that I had entanglements elsewhere which are no business of the reader’s—that she was very lame, was plain, and generally unattractive to the outward eye. Granted again that she was none of my seeking, and that I dared not show the promptitude in answering her letters, or in coming to see her which I should like to have shown, through sheer fear of encouraging false hopes (which I made it clear from the first could not be realised). Granted that she dearly loved teasing and worrying me, when I was in great need of peace; for the years, especially the later years of our friendship, were far the most wearing that I have passed through—and of some things—especially Pauli’s treatment of me—she knew not a word. Granted that she oppressed me with her very brilliancy—nay, bored me—for there is no bore like a brilliant bore. . . . Add to this that if I had

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given her all she would have me give her—I mean if I had married her—nay, it was absurd. I should have married her in cold blood, not because I wanted to marry her, but because she wanted me to marry her. With most men this is a sufficient . . .” The last sentence was never finished. Butler began it—almost the last words he wrote—when he was himself a few months from his death.

Whether or not Miss Savage knew that Aunt Alethea was based on her, she had no liking for her. “I think,” she wrote in a letter to Butler, “you make the aunt a little ridiculous when you say that she preferred to encourage others rather than paint or write herself. When people don’t do things themselves it is either because they couldn’t if they tried, or because they are lazy, or because they have something else to do, or because they are morbidly vain. But Aunt Alethea was perfect. You make her like that most odious of women, Mrs. John Stuart Mill—who, though capable of surpassing Shelley, preferred to efface herself for the greater comfort of Mr. John Stuart Mill! At least that is what he was so extraordinarily simple-minded as to be taught to believe.” After Miss Savage’s death, the vision of a gay, nonchalant Butler loving a gay, rich, beautiful Miss Savage, and in his gay, nonchalant way asking her to marry him at regular intervals, knowing that he would be gaily refused, was no longer valid, and was replaced by an elderly, sad, resigned Butler looking back on the days that were no more, on his own imperfection and Miss Savage’s perfection, on love that had been offered him and that he had been too impure to accept. Ah, the dear, little, lame lady—if only

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she had not been lame and unattractive and poor and thirty-six; if only she had not bored him, making his neck swell and his head ache, if only things had not been so difficult for him just then—entanglements elsewhere—an appointment every Wednesday afternoon in Handel Street, three lunch appointments a week, such entanglements—if only she had not been herself, and he not himself, how happy they might have been together!

When she wrote that she wished Butler did not know right from wrong Miss Savage put her finger on his weak spot, and showed that she knew him. From the moment that he stopped saying his prayers, he was haunted by right and wrong. In the first flush of stopping praying it had seemed easy—"My dear boy . . . I do right because I think it wrong to do otherwise." Later on, this blithe formula failed him. He found that though his passion to do right, like his passion for Handel, persisted, the question of what was right became increasingly difficult to answer. He fell out of the frying-pan of saying his prayers into the fire of being a moralist. It made him a bore, like a man who begins all his anecdotes from the very beginning. Miss Savage pitied Butler as she saw him brooding on right and wrong, turning over right and wrong in his mind like a dog worrying a bone. After all, what she offered him was very simple—just her sincere affection, the gaiety and happiness that would come to both of them from their understanding of each other's nature, instinctive sympathy with his point of view and admiration for his genius. She offered him all this as simply and unself-consciously as he offered her cherries as



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he walked along Berners Street, asking nothing in return, attempting no romanticising of herself or of him, content to be a lame, poor, unattractive woman with an external cancer from which she would sooner or later die.

Butler could not accept what she offered him. It was not in his nature to do so, because he had eaten of the fruit of the knowledge of right from wrong. He had to think it out. Thinking it out was what made his neck swell and his head ache, not Miss Savage's brilliance. Thinking it out meant visions, rumblings in his spirit, phantoms and nightmares flitting about the darkness of his soul. She was not lame and dowdy and poor, but beautiful and fashionable and rich; she was lame and dowdy and poor, and he, alas, could not bring himself to ease her infirm body for her; she was dead, and her memory haunted him constantly, because he had never requited her love in the only way she wanted it to be requited.

If I abolish wrong, he thought, only right will remain. Abolishing wrong meant abolishing everyone and everything, because everyone and everything was wrong. He abolished everyone and everything, leaving only himself and right. It was lonely, but he persisted, feeling it to be his mission. In an empty universe he dwelt alone with right. Nothingness washed round him in dreary waves of boredom ("I bore," he groaned again and again, "and am bored"), but he comforted himself because right was there with him. At last he had separated out right, at last isolated it from wrong. At last right reigned supreme.

Sitting alone in his room in Clifford's Inn with the debris of the wrong he had destroyed all

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round him, he looked tenderly at right, for whose sake the destruction had been wrought. Where was it, after all? Only shadows and echoes in his room—"Oh, my boy, my boy!"—his father's dying head between his hands: "Oh, then he'll tell us how long it will be before we shall all of us have to turn out"—an oratorio of Handel's playing, it at least right, it, too, nothing—Pauli's hand held out, and: "Oh, thank you"—the room overflowing with words, Jones's words, his own, innumerable words, making a confused groan. Had right, then, also been destroyed, along with wrong? Did the two stand or fall together? Was the heritage of right he had hoarded for posterity as unsubstantial as the companies in which, on Henry Hoare's advice, he had invested his New Zealand money? "There must be something," he muttered. His eye lit up—"The cheque-book, Alfred." That was something.

## VI

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"You don't really care for good things—it is your only fault that you don't. It is all hypocrisy your saying that you care."—Letter from Miss Savage to Butler, 1874.

"If I were asked what I flattered myself upon as being the pre-eminent virtues of Shrewsbury, I should say sincerity, downrightness, hatred of sham, love of work, and a strong sense of duty. What little of these noble qualities I dare pretend to, I owe hardly more to my parents than to the school at which they placed me."—"The Life & Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler."

"MEN and women," Butler noted down, "exist only as the organs and tools of the ideas that dominate them." To him, the reality of life was ideas, and all that lived only the instruments whereon these ideas were played. Ideas blew through human being like wind through the hollow statues guarding the entrance to Erewhon, producing Handel's oratorios; and the only function of the statues was to be blown through. From the moment that he turned away his face disgustedly from Badcock, and sadly from Towneley, his life became one idea after another. Out of each he made a book, getting so excited over them that, for instance in the case of *Life and Habit*, at the climax he could scarcely breathe. These ideas of his would long ago have become dust but for the fact that hate enlivened them. Like a blood-stream, hate carried strength and vitality to his thought, making it, even at its most fantastic, somehow impressive, even frightening.

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Self-righteously, he laid aside faith, but all the appurtenances of the faith in which he had been brought up remained; only, instead of embodying, however remotely and imperfectly, the conception of love, they came to embody the contrary conception, hate. He still went on singing hymns, but hymns about getting his own back on his enemies; he still was hearty and earnest and righteous, only in the same sort of way that a Nonconformist who has lost his faith is adulterous—unlawful sheets as drab as lawful. His agnosticism had all the gaucherie of the Christianity he had shed and none of its redeeming features. He remained to the end, as he said himself, a Broad Churchman, but without a church, so that what he said in effect was that he remained broad. To be a Broad Churchman is bad enough, but to be broad without being a churchman is terrible; and this is what Butler was—an earnest atheist.

He might just as well have become a clergyman, since he was one; he might just as well have married Madame as go to her every Wednesday afternoon at a pound a time; he might just as well have gone on working amongst adolescent lads in the parish of St. James's, Piccadilly, as sit, "my Mr. Butler and his dear friend Jones," on either side of Remi Faesch, and talk about God being the greatest philosopher without intellect, and just as well have preached the Gospel as creative evolution. He was always hacking at stubble, and full of the unease engendered by ideas bubbling and stewing in the darkness of a fanatical spirit. Ideas go bad in a fanatical spirit, like milk in thundery weather. They went bad in Butler, and so thought as such did not

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satisfy him. He wanted his ideas to enliven the institutions of the faith he had discarded, and they would not. Buffonism, Lamarckism, Butlerism—however passionately he might uphold them, however venomously denounce the Anti-Lamarck or Anti-Butler—Darwin—it was somehow unconvincing. He blew and blew, and the dry bones did not live. They just lay there, white and boring. Boring! That was his particular torment, to know that he was a bore and to be bored, to feel boredom in the very texture of his being, to recognise that whatever scene he might describe, whatever idea unfold, the final shape was a country rectory, with heavy, sullen furniture, stale and twilit, and full of the drone of unfelt, unhopeful prayer. His ideas floundered about helplessly—give them colour, and three or four might be hung in the Royal Academy; give them sound, and lo! *Narcissus*, an album of songs and gavottes; write them in books, published at his own expense, each one less in demand than the last; live them, and they were a routine, the concomitants of an emancipated, satisfying life—love, friendship, sensuality, travel, occupation, a sufficient income, all that was most desirable in his eyes; and the result? A routine. He did not know whether he was going to the Museum or to Handel Street. Breathing might be difficult because of Pauli or Madame or *Life and Habit*. Was he going on holiday or to look at his house property? A letter from Miss Savage or a bill?

The first idea that Butler became the organ or tool of was Darwinism. When he returned to England from New Zealand he decided to collect together all he had written on the subject, and

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develop it into a book. This book became *Erewhon*, the only one of his books that was commercially successful in his lifetime. Butler believed that it was successful because it was published anonymously, and thought by some reviewers to be by Lord Lytton. He often used to complain that from the moment he disclosed the fact that he had written it, its sales fell off. As a matter of fact, according to his own analysis of the sales of his books, one edition of a thousand sold between the end of March and the end of May, 1872; and subsequently, in spite of the disclosure of his authorship, no less than three more editions were issued, so that in all nearly four thousand copies of the book were sold. Jones, of course, echoes Butler's opinion regarding the sales of *Erewhon*; "as soon as the *Athenæum* announced that *Erewhon* was by a nobody, the demand fell 90 per cent.," he writes, and then proceeds to give figures proving that, when Butler's other books were having each a worse sale than the last, *Erewhon* continued to sell fairly steadily. The discrepancy is only worth pointing out because it shows how Butler was at the mercy of his obsessions, and the uncritical spirit with which Jones accepted their validity. His lack of success as a writer, he assumed, was due to persecution, resentment on the part of writers with established reputations at a newcomer so uncompromising and able as he; therefore, if he published a book anonymously it would sell, and the moment it was known to be by him its sales fall off; therefore, *Erewhon's* sales dropped 90 per cent. when the authorship was announced, and this quite irrespective of the fact that, on his own showing, after a natural spurt at the begin-



ning, it sold slowly but steadily over a large number of years.

In *Erewhon* there is little of the personal bitterness and animosity which spoils Butler's later books. It is light-hearted and genuinely fanciful. When he wrote it, he had not yet become a moralist. He was in the pleasant transitional stage between belief and unbelief, without the depth of the one or the ponderousness of the other, like the stage in a love affair when the weight of matrimony is lifted, and before the new, and more intolerable, burden has made itself felt. This made *Erewhon* popular. It was not quite neat and compact enough to have a really large sale; in places it was dull, but all the same sufficiently original, and yet contemporary, to appeal to a fairly wide public. Flattering notices appeared in a number of newspapers and periodicals, and Butler began to be asked to dinner-parties, to be lionised in a mild way. He reacted aggressively in the company of the Great. They were out, he felt, to humiliate or patronise him, and so he was surly and ill-at-ease, determined to make it clear by his manner that he for one was not taken in by their pompous self-confidence, knew them for what they were—charlatans and mediocrities and hypocrites; “when *Erewhon* came out Hoare and Marriott kept urging me to try and imitate John Morley's style, so I got his *Voltaire*, and disliked it very much. Then I was to meet Morley. Marriott was to give a dinner and Morley and I were to be brought together. This came off; Marriott gave a splendid feed, which I regret to say I have never to this day returned; and Morley and I were put to sit in the middle of the

table side by side, and there was to be a feast of reason and a flow of soul—a part of the programme which did not come off. Morley talked a great deal, and so, I have no doubt, did I; but I cannot, happily, remember one syllable that was said by either of us; all I remember is that I disliked and distrusted Morley. . . . I met Morley again a year or two later at Marriott's, and again we did not like each other; but this time my short-lived laurels had begun to fade and *Erewhon* was passing for a book of which a good deal too much had been made."

All the same, Butler always made a point, when he met anyone like Morley, of writing to one or other member of his family about it; and when he came to enjoy a certain fame himself in Sicily he greatly enjoyed seeing his arrival announced in the newspaper, and presiding over banquets, and generally playing at being an important personage. He felt ill-at-ease in Morley's company mainly because he supposed that he was expected to look up to him, to acknowledge an inferiority that he would not admit to feeling. When, as in Sicily, it was he who ruled the roast, his attitude was quite different. With what glee he told his father, after a visit to his old school, that he had been regarded as important enough to be able to get a special half-holiday granted! How gleefully he remarked to Dr. Burd, soon after Canon Butler's death: "You see, Dr. Burd, one of the greatest feathers in my father's cap was one that I cannot refer to . . . that he was *my* father!"

Few people have had more respect than he for the mighty in their seats, especially when they

were rich as well as mighty. He used to listen wistfully while Pauli talked about his swell friends, humbly looked at photographs of them, framed two postcards he had from Gladstone and hung them up in his room, and regularly attended the Shrewsbury dinner. "Why should I," he wrote of this dinner in 1886, "knowing that I do not particularly like these people nor they me, why should I, who never liked my school nor got much good from it, go and pay a guinea for a bad dinner, and eat and drink what it takes me a whole day to recover from? It does not seem a very sensible thing to do, and yet people tell me I ought to go. I wish I knew whether they are right or I, who think the whole thing a nuisance. I think that, considering the Ishmaelitish line which I have been led and driven to take in literature, the less I venture into the enemy's camp the better. They say that the more I take the Ishmaelitish line the more incumbent it is upon me to do the correctest of correct things occasionally, when time and the occasion serve. I believe they are right, and this is why I went, and shall hope to go upon a future occasion, but like it I do not." In a postscript dated February 1, 1898, he added: "I have never missed a single one of these functions since writing the above." His outcast state did not please him, though he often professed to be quite satisfied with it. Nor did he, again as he often professed, suffer no heartburning at the small sales of his books. In him were the makings of a pillar of society. The Royal Academy in which his pictures were hung was, he wrote to Miss Savage, a "capital exhibition." It was only when his pictures began

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to be refused that his spleen vented itself on Royal Academies in general.

*Erewhon* contains most of the ideas that Butler spent his life arranging and re-arranging. They are in *Erewhon* in their freshest, least-laboured form, since *Erewhon* represents the stage in his intellectual pilgrimage when he saw the Promised Land to which stopping saying his prayers had brought him from a mountain top, seeming infinitely varied and flowing with milk and honey, but before he had any close acquaintance with it. He was just back from New Zealand; he had money of his own; he felt free of Langar; he had Pauli. Behind him the sombre mediocrity of his father's Rectory, working amongst lads, organising a choir and thereby making contact with the poorer passengers whom he might not otherwise have got to know at all; in front a new world in which anything might happen, time move backwards, machines evolve into a new and higher kind of life than man, and yet in which whatever did happen would be comprehensible, susceptible to formulisation, having an orderliness which he, to his everlasting glory, might discern.

Higgs, the hero of *Erewhon*, as Miss Savage at once detected, and pointed out in her review of the book in *The Drawing Room Gazette*, is a prig. As Butler went to New Zealand and discovered a new world, so did he; and the prelude to both their new worlds, the link between it and the old one, was Handel's music—"A few steps brought me nearer, and a shudder of unutterable horror ran through me when I saw a circle of gigantic forms, many times higher than myself, upstanding grim and grey through the veil of

cloud before me. . . . Each was terrible after a different kind. One was raging furiously, as in pain and great despair; another was lean and cadaverous with famine; another cruel and idiotic, but with the silliest simper that can be conceived. . . . The inhuman beings into whose hearts the Evil One had put it to conceive these statues, had made their heads into a sort of organ-pipe, so that their mouths should catch the wind and sound with its blowing." The music the wind played as it blew through these monsters was by "the greatest of all musicians."

Both Butler and Higgs had to overcome many difficulties, face suffering and despair and privations ("rejecting the pounds, shillings and pence and going in search of my own bread in my own way"), mitigated only by the massive chords that blew through the emptiness of their terror; but, having nerved themselves to pass the monsters guarding the way into Erewhon, they were free to wander there as they liked, at last to escape, Higgs in a balloon with Arowhena, Butler in a boat with Pauli. The monsters were Badcock, Langar, love and hate, fertility, all that impeded Butler from entering the new world that opened in front of him when he read *The Origin of Species*. Eyes closed, on tiptoe, he passed them by, listened, awed, to the majestic sounds they made, drawing comfort and encouragement from its familiarity; and then—then, delighted, he found himself amongst the Colleges of Unreason, Musical Banks, Straighteners, in an infinitely varied and variable land, never frightening like the one he had left because unmysterious, no rankness of fecundity, no contrast of light and darkness, a twilight land of

ideas that could never be monotonous or hurtful because empty except for changing shadows.

*Erewhon* is too earnest quite to succeed as satire. "Earnestness," Butler said of Disraeli, "was his greatest danger, but if he did not quite overcome it (as indeed who can? it is the last enemy that shall be subdued), he managed to veil it with a fair amount of success." Butler himself scarcely managed even that. Earnestness breaks through all his work. He named his favourite hero Ernest, and made him live up to his name. Swift had a universal contempt for the ways of men, whereas Butler only despised such of their ways as did not suit him. It was not so much that, like Swift, he hated life, as that he feared it. His fellow-humans often seemed like Yahoos in his eyes, but Yahoos in process of becoming Nice People, never just Yahoos, disgusting creatures born to wallow for ever in their own filth and native spitefulness. He criticised from the vantage point of theoretical self-satisfaction, unlike Swift, whose bitterness of spirit came of the conviction that he too stank. Butler wanted to make his father smart, and so ridiculed fatherhood and priesthood; he wanted to make dons and scientists smart, and so ridiculed academicism; he wanted to punish whoever had failed to recognise his wit and understanding, and so constantly enlarged the range of his venom; but beneath all his attacks lay the consciousness that there were sensible men-of-letters going daily to and from the British Museum, buying milk instead of keeping cows, investing their money securely and living within their incomes. A bishop or a professor had only to smile upon him, and lo! he became a brand plucked from the burning, a



Royal Academy only to hang one of his pictures, and lo! it became a "capital exhibition." With Swift it was otherwise. He saw the skull beneath the flesh of his patrons more clearly even than of his enemies, snarled more savagely against the Great when they fawned even than when they showed their fangs; saw men as pigs fighting round a trough, wallowing in their own filth, floundering against one another as they struggled to satisfy their greed.

They both had a horror of sex that tapered off into sentimentality and baby talk, and both spent their declining years brooding on love that had been unfulfilled. Swift sat alone in his Deanery, with the bells of Dublin tolling in his honour, mad, about to die, and pulled out a lock of Stella's hair labelled "Only a woman's hair"; Butler, also alone, and about to die, but with no bells tolling in his honour and not mad, sorted out Miss Savage's letters and made notes on them about his own unworthiness of such love as hers. It was an essentially different reaction from Swift's, less real, less genuine. "Only a woman's hair" was the truth. Swift could not marry Stella, though he loved her, because she was a woman, and he hated women; because she had a body and he hated bodies. Butler's "Therefore she haunts me, and always will haunt, because I never felt for her the love that if I had been a better man I should have felt" was not the truth at all. He himself confutes it again and again. It did not describe his feelings about Miss Savage. He had never loved her, and, as a better or worse man, never could have loved her. The whole thing was pretence, like his renunciation of his father's money, and his determination not to

allow his father's will to enter at all into the matter of his writings, and his stiff upper lip when his father at last removed the entail on the Whitehall property so that he could raise money on it and be independent.

*Erewhon* has none of the bite of *Gulliver's Travels*. The Erewhonians do not so much show up the follies and baseness of human beings as express Butler's own fads. It is a burlesque, like Overton's—"I had also dramatised *The Pilgrim's Progress* for a Christmas pantomime, and made an important scene of Vanity Fair, with Mr. Greatheart, Apollyon, Christina, Mercy and Hopeful as the principal characters. The orchestra played music taken from Handel's best-known works, but the time was a good deal altered, and altogether the tunes were not exactly as Handel left them. Mr. Greatheart was very stout and had a red nose. . . . Hopeful was up to as much mischief as I could give him. . . . Christina did not wear much of anything."

After *Erewhon* Butler returned in his next book, *The Fair Haven*, to those religious doubts which had saved him from ordination, carried him past the hollow monsters chanting Handel as the wind blew through them, and into Erewhon. He set out to satirise Christianity, but, he thought, cunningly, in such a way that, under a guise of a defending orthodoxy against the free-thinkers, he would in fact reveal the weakness of its defence. This he believed and hoped would create a sensation, profoundly shock the pious and delight the impious. He had a vision of indignant protests in religious papers like the *Rock*, and of appreciative comments in more sceptical

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publications; he saw himself entering the fray, always sweetly reasonable, using the idiom of the devout, at the same time mocking everything held in respect at Langar, making it appear ridiculous and contemptible. "I should hope," he wrote to Miss Savage a short while before the book's publication, "that attacks on *The Fair Haven* will give me an opportunity of excusing myself, and if so I shall endeavour that the excuse may be worse than the fault it is intended to excuse." In another letter describing his difficulties in finding a publisher for it, he wrote: "I dare say I shall get into a row—at least I hope I shall."

What happened when *The Fair Haven* was published was, from his point of view, distinctly disappointing. The *Rock* devoted two appreciative articles to it, since "the importance of the volume compels us to depart from our custom of reviewing with brevity works entrusted to us"; the *Scotsman* referred to its being "throughout in downright, almost pathetic earnestness"; and Darwin wrote in a letter that had he not known that Butler wrote it "I should not even have suspected that the author was not orthodox, within the wide stated limits. I should have thought that he was a conscientious man like Blanco White," and the sceptical Press, which should, according to Butler's plans, have chuckled appreciatively, for the most part did not review it at all. Clergymen lent *The Fair Haven* to young men troubled by doubts, and elderly religious ladies piously turned over its pages, while the sort of clever scientist-agnostic person on whose side Butler was eager to declare himself, if he happened to pick it up, and whether he

saw through the deception or not, found the book merely tedious and soon laid it down again.

As Butler is Higgs so he is John Pickard Owen; like him, had his doubts aroused by finding that unbaptised boys could not be recognised at sight from baptised ones; like him, was "alternately under the influence of two conflicting spirits—at one time writing as though there was nothing precious under the sun except logic, consistency, and precision, and breathing fire and smoke against even very trifling deviations from the path of exact criticism—at another leading the reader almost to believe that he disregarded the value of any objective truth, and speaking of endeavour after accuracy in terms that are positively contemptuous"; like him, found "science cold and dead . . . unless supplemented by art and religion."

To a clergyman friend he indignantly denied that he had meant the Christ-Ideal chapters seriously; but he did mean them seriously without intending to, or wanting to, just as he had been a hard-working, steady undergraduate without wanting to. When Swift set out his arguments against the abolition of Christianity, he did so from the point of view of a man who absolutely accepted the letter of Christian doctrine, and therefore the satire is apparent and pungent; when Butler tried to set out the pitiable shifts to which bewildered souls with intellectual qualms are driven to hold on to a faith half their nature craves for, he did so from the point of view of a man who was himself precisely in that situation, and therefore the satire is thin, unconvincing, enveloped in clouds of unmistakable earnestness. The *Scotsman* was quite right—

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“throughout in downright, almost pathetic earnestness.”

. . . . .

On closer acquaintance Erewhon, the brave new world, proved as painful to live in as Langar, the stale old world. Indeed, the two had many points of resemblance, often seemed identical, and came at last, in *Erewhon Revisited*, to be one and the same. Butler found that he had not disposed of religion by stopping saying his prayers, nor found an infallible solution to his difficulties in Darwinism. He had to tread the same weary pilgrimage as William Pickard Owen, if not becoming a Baptist and being “immersed in a pond near Dorking” carrying sandwiches there and tramping his discontent up Leith Hill. Free Thought cried “On,” and the fiend, his uneasy and unsatisfied spirit, cried “Back.” He paused irresolute. The resurrection of Christ was palpably untrue; a universe in which life progressed in consequence of chance variations left out Handel, and the emotions engendered, for instance, by old buildings and by Pauli. No verbal gymnastics would convince him that a man might be crucified, dead and buried and then on the third day rise again. The furthest he would go was to suppose the man had swooned, awakened in his tomb and then staggered out of it, living on a little while, and showing himself sparingly to his disciples, thus providing the miraculous basis for a not ignoble religion. On the other hand, he was not prepared to believe, as he imagined Darwin wanted him to, that chance alone had given life all its diversity and complexity.

He would brood on this dilemma as he got up

in the morning, tied his tie, fastened his trousers, cleaned his teeth, so absorbed in his thinking that he scarcely knew what he was doing. Why, he wondered casually, was he able to tie his tie and do something else at the same time?—because he was used to tying it, because the action had become habitual. The more habitual an action the more unconsciously it was performed. For instance, breathing was almost unconscious, the circulation of the blood and digestion quite. Yet when had he learnt to breathe and to circulate his blood and to digest food? Perhaps in the case of breathing he might be said to have learnt it as a baby—just a moment of uncertainty, and then perfect execution, like recalling verses learnt long ago, faltering over a line or two, and then remembering perfectly; but with circulation and digestion, if he had learnt them, it must have been before birth. Might it not be, then, that these habits were ancestral, that æons ago some ancestor had struggled to digest as now a child struggled to speak, and that gradually the habit had become perfected, and therefore unconscious, so that he remembered how to digest in the same way that he remembered to grow teeth and hair?

It was just what he wanted, since it introduced the element of purposiveness that he felt Darwinism lacked. Life evolved, not merely through the play of chance, but because it had an innate determination to evolve. The amoeba wanted to become something higher as he wanted to become Pauli. It wanted to shake off its sorry past as he wanted to shake off Langar; and the means whereby it was able to achieve this was



habit. Each upward striving was registered, until the amœba had learnt to make a step forward; then made permanent and bequeathed, as the blessedness of wealth was painfully acquired and then bequeathed from generation to generation. In each living organism was the memory of all that had happened to make it what it was; and every striving on its part was added unto the universal memory, thereby contributing to progress. As a consequence of all this, separate individuality went. Birth and death were merely a change of state, rather more dramatic than, say, growth, but of the same nature. If the Butler of to-day was the Butler of yesterday, then so was he also the Butler of a year ago, of the morning after he had been begotten, of the morning before, of æons and æons before. As he wrote in a series of articles published in the *Examiner* in 1879 entitled "God the Known and God the Unknown": "The most sure proof of a man's identity is the power to remember that such and such things happened, which none but he can know; the most sure proof of his remembering is the power to react his part in the original drama, whatever it may have been; if a man can repeat a performance with consummate truth, and can stand any amount of cross-questioning about it, he is the performer of the original performance, whatever it was. The memories which all living forms prove by their actions that they possess—the memories of their common identity with a single person in whom they meet—this is incontestable proof of their being animated by a common soul. It is certain, therefore, that all living forms, whether animal or vegetable, are in reality one animal; we and

the mosses being part of the same vast person in no figurative sense, but with as much *bona-fide* literal truth as when we say that a man's finger-nails and eyes are parts of the same man."

In this way Butler brought back the conception of God, but a sort of pantheistic God. He had what he had wanted, "free thought and religion." Chance yielded to purpose, and order to disorder. The universe became a more hospitable place in his eyes because more secure, gilt-edged rather than speculative. Again, as unconscious knowledge was perfect knowledge, so unconscious virtue was true virtue. Men, he argued in *Life and Habit*, are divisible into two distinct classes "corresponding not inaptly with the two main parties into which the political world is divided"—on the one hand, those who have "good health, good looks, good temper, common sense and energy," and who "hold all these good things in such perfection as to be altogether without introspection—to be not under the law, but so entirely under grace that everyone who sees them likes them"; on the other, the "pioneers," some "agreeable people well versed in the older sciences," and others "noticeably ignorant of the sciences which have already become current with the larger part of mankind—in other words, they are ugly, rude, and disagreeable people, very progressive, it may be, but very aggressive to boot."

So everything fitted into place. His mind, like his life, became a pattern. There was a pattern for thinking as well as a pattern for living. Swells were better than he was because "those who have good fortune (mother and sole cause of virtue, and sole virtue in itself), and

have profited by their experience, and known their business best before birth, so that they have made themselves both to be and to look well, do commonly on an average prove to know it best in after-life." If he could never get clothes to fit him well, whereas Pauli could, it was because "they grow their clothes best who have grown their limbs best." He had done the early part of his learning rather badly, and for this he blamed his parents. His mother's womb had been a bad classroom, and his father had passed on to him ill-learned lessons, so that now carbuncles grew on his groin, like spelling mistakes in the composition of a badly taught child. However much he might struggle, he could never catch up with those whose pre-natal training was so vastly superior to his, but had to reconcile himself to a position of inferiority. Solace came, however, by looking forward—"troops of young men and maidens crowned with flowers and singing of love and youth and wine." This was God. As a Broad Churchman of the more enlightened sort he praised God's name in hearty, earnest accents, hymn-book shaking up and down with the vigour of his praise. Then, not kneeling, eyes wide open, he prayed extempore, heart overflowing with joy and thankfulness to think that he had a part in the urge of life constantly to be improving itself, as he had a part in the urge of his father's money constantly to be adding interest unto itself.

Butler first stated his theory of "the substantial identity between heredity and memory" in *Life and Habit*, pointing out that this involved the "re-introduction of design into organic development." Such a point of view made

inevitable some depreciation of Darwin's work. Already he had found it necessary to apologise to Darwin for certain, not criticisms, but seeming light handling of the principle of natural selection. Now he had to come out in the open and amend *The Origin of Species*. At first he trod very gingerly, as though to say: "Who am I to venture to disagree with so deservedly recognised an authority?" It was the same stage in his scientific development as the letter to his father about Article XV in his religious development—"I may be wrong, am open to conviction, quite realise the temerity of what I am doing; but there it is, thus the matter seems to me to stand." As he expected his father to meet his objection to Article XV with fair argument, so he expected Darwin to meet his objection to fortuitous natural selection with fair argument; and when he found that *Life and Habit* was either ignored, or brushed contemptuously aside as the idle speculation of an amateur with no scientific training, he grew bitter and angry. Let them confute his theory and he would be quite content. Let them show him just where he was wrong. But to ignore what he had to say! to treat it as of no account! This was monstrous. He began to smell a conspiracy. Darwin and his admirers resented a newcomer butting in on their preserves. They saw only too well the importance and truth of *Life and Habit*, but rather than take up his challenge, thereby admitting him as one of themselves, they preferred to use their great influence to get him frozen out of the circle of scientific writers. Like Canon Butler, they were concerned only to prevent him making himself felt in the world.

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Having fled from the Church to the bosom of Science, believing that there he would be free from the trammels of authority, the tedium of rule-of-thumb thinking, the deathliness of obscurantism masquerading as truth, presented as truth by a hypocritical and graceless priesthood, he found that Science could be as dogmatic as any Church, and with less justification; and its devotees as bigoted as any country clergyman. Even in *Life and Habit* he had written: "Others say that . . . the coming religion is science. Certainly its apostles preach it without misgivings, but it is not on that account less possible that it may prove only to be the coming superstition—like Christianity, true to its true votaries, and, like Christianity, false to those who follow it introspectively. It may well be that we shall find we have escaped from one set of taskmasters to fall into the hands of others far more ruthless. The tyranny of the Church is light in comparison with that which future generations may have to undergo at the hands of future doctrinaires. The Church did uphold a grace of some sort as the *summum bonum*, in comparison with which all so-called earthly knowledge—knowledge, that is to say, which had not passed through so many people as to become living and incarnate—was unimportant. . . . The so-called man-of-science, on the other hand, seems now generally inclined to make light of all knowledge, save of the pioneer character. His ideal is self-conscious knowledge. . . . He is but medicine-man, augur, priest, in its latest development; useful it may be, but requiring to be well watched by those who value freedom. Wait until he has become more powerful, and note the

vagaries which his conceit of knowledge will indulge in."

Butler developed this theme on many subsequent occasions. "I might attack Christianity as much as I chose," he wrote bitterly in 1901, "and nobody cared one straw; but when I attacked Darwin it was a different matter. For many years *Evolution, Old and New* and *Unconscious Memory* made a shipwreck of my literary prospects." He came even to have a certain tenderness for the Church, as pre-War Russian revolutionaries have nowadays for the Tsarist regime. Not only did he describe himself as an advanced Broad Churchman, but in a chapter appended to *Evolution, Old and New* entitled "Rome and Pantheism," held out the hope that the day might come when the Church of Rome would "develop some doctrine or, I know not how, provide some means by which men like myself, who cannot pretend to believe in the miraculous element in Christianity, could yet join her as a conservative stronghold, since I believe the difference between her faith and that of all who can be called gentlemen to be one of words rather than things." He even saw some indication of the coming to pass of this happy consummation in a Papal Encyclical of August 4, 1879, which "desires the Bishops and Clergy to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas, and to spread it far and wide."

Butler followed up *Life and Habit* with *Evolution, Old and New*, which was published in 1879. It contains a historical review of the theory of evolution, short memoirs of Buffon, Dr. Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck, the whole being designed to show that Charles Darwin could in no wise



be credited with having invented the theory to which his name had been given, and that his predecessors, in that they accepted the fact of design, of organisms purposively or creatively evolving, were far ahead of him, and incidentally, in substantial agreement with Butler's views on the matter. Henceforth he became a campaigner for the restoration of credit to these, he thought wilfully overlooked pioneers. His voice throbbed when he spoke of the wrongs they had suffered. Like him, they had thought and written truthfully only to be robbed of all recognition by charlatans and ignoramuses joined in an unholy alliance to monopolise the limelight,

Matters were made worse by what seemed to Butler a piece of deliberate sharp-practice on Darwin's part. Three months after the publication of *Evolution, Old and New*, Darwin published a *Life* of his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, which included what purported to be a translation of an article by a Dr. Krause. As Darwin described this article, it looked as though it had been written before the publication of *Evolution, Old and New*; actually, Butler thought he detected in it definite traces of, and, in the last paragraph, an attack on his own book. He therefore obtained a copy of the German periodical in which Dr. Krause's article had first appeared, and found, as he had suspected, that the translation of it given in Darwin's *Life of Erasmus Darwin* did not correspond with the original, and that the added passages were precisely those which had seemed to him to bear on *Evolution, Old and New*. When he charged Darwin with this, Darwin replied that Dr. Krause's article had been altered, but that such a practice was "so com-

mon that it never occurred to me to state that the article had been modified." Thereupon, Butler wrote a long letter to the *Athenæum* about the matter, to which Darwin, acting on the advice of his friends, offered no reply. The affair festered on for many years, and confirmed Butler in his opinion that Darwin and his set were out to down him by any means, fair or foul. His other two books about evolution—*Unconscious Memory* and *Luck or Cunning?*—abound in denunciations of the "Darwin clique" and confutations of their attacks on him, but add little to the ideas already put forward in *Life and Habit* and *Evolution, Old and New*, except to confirm them with reference to a lecture by Professor Hering on "Memory as a Universal Function of Organised Matter," and tentatively to extend their application to inorganic matter.

In the Memoir of John Pickard Owen Butler made what amounted to a first draft of *The Way of All Flesh*. The scheme is the same—a not very robust little boy with a queerly literal mind, who "from his earliest childhood liked to carry his theories to their legitimate conclusion," and whose mother, with the word "love" on her lips and the fear of God in her heart, twisted his spirit, and piled up unhappiness for him hereafter. Like Ernest Pontifex, John Pickard Owen, by the time he was four, "could repeat the Apostles' Creed, the General Confession, and the Lord's Prayer without a blunder"; like Ernest Pontifex, too, he was shocked to find that "no difference in disposition or conduct could be discovered" between baptised and unbaptised,

and began to wonder: "Was then the Grace of God a gift which left no trace whatever upon those who were possessed of it—a thing the presence or absence of which might be ascertained by consulting the parish registry, but not discernible in conduct?" Both of them were brought up to accept without question the literal truth of Evangelical Christianity, and both set out on a quest for truth, in Owen's case ending in imbecility, and in Ernest's in smug, earnest atheism.

There is, too, in the Owen Memoir and *The Way of All Flesh* the same attribution of all spiritual disorder, shipwreck and ambush of young days, to family influences; only in Owen's case the positive as well as the negative side of the question is brought out. Owen's mother is more like Theobald than Christina; but his father, who died when he was still a child, "was a singularly gentle and humorous playmate," doted on his children and never spoke unkindly. "The charm of such a recollection can never be dispelled; both my brother and myself returned his love with interest, and cherished his memory with the most affectionate regret. . . . So sweet and winning was his nature that his slightest wish was our law—and whenever we pleased him, no matter how little, he never failed to thank us as though we had done him a service which we should have a perfect right to withhold. How proud we were upon any of these occasions, and how we courted the opportunity of being thanked! He did indeed well know the art of becoming idolised by his children, and dearly did he prize the results of his own proficiency; yet truly there was no art about it;

all arose spontaneously from the well-spring of a sympathetic nature which was quick to feel as others felt, whether old or young, rich or poor, wise or foolish." This idyllic portrait of a father is followed by an account of the blessedness of spontaneous family affection.

All his life Butler was troubled by a sense of what he had lost by having unsympathetic parents. Of Buffon he wrote—"The man who could be father of such a son, and who could retain that son's affection, as it is well known that Buffon retained it, may not perhaps always be strictly accurate, but it will be well to pay attention to whatever he may think fit to tell us." As a guarantee of the soundness of Buffon's scientific writing his enjoyment of his son's affection seems a bit irrelevant; but the importance Butler attaches to it shows how deeply he felt his own estrangement from his father, and reveals another division in his own nature. As an evolutionist he believed that it was inevitable a father and son should hate one another in the same way that it was inevitable a new form of life should hate the form from which it had evolved; as a sentimentalist he believed parental love to be both natural and necessary, and attributed most of his own limitations, and the troubles that beset him, to its lack.

By the time he came to write *The Way of All Flesh* (he went on writing at it for years), he had abandoned all hope of regaining his parents' affection, or his affection for them. There was no positive side to the story. It was all hate, just hate. Instead of a gentle John Pickard Owen immersed in a pond near Dorking, a life was blighted, only saved at the last moment by

Aunt Alethea's £70,000. Heatherley, his art teacher, said, after reading the manuscript, that Butler "had taken all the tenderest feelings of our nature and, having spread them carefully over the floor, stamped upon them till he had reduced them to an indistinguishable mass of filth and then handed them round for inspection." This was not what Butler wanted to do. He wanted to show how the lack of these "tenderest feelings of our nature" had stunted and deformed him, and how it was only most exceptional people like Ernest Pontifex, blessed with exceptional sums of money, who could hope to undo the harm they sustained through having unsympathetic parents.

When Butler, on Miss Savage's and Darwin's advice, sat down to write a novel, there was only one thing for him to write about—himself. All novelists write about themselves; but in *The Way of All Flesh* Butler wrote about himself more intensively than perhaps anyone else ever has. Overton, who tells the story, is himself, and Ernest Pontifex, its hero, is also himself; Theobald and Christina are images of himself through one end of a telescope, and Aunt Alethea and Towneley images of himself through the other end. The book is adolescent in the passion and naïveté of its introspection. It is almost impossible to believe that it was actually revised (as it was) in the last year or so of Butler's life. The nearest thing to it in literature is Rousseau's *Confessions*, the nearest thing in life those reveries that come to people after their vanity has been wounded.

*The Way of All Flesh* is such a reverie. Through hours and hours and hours it was built up—old,

complacent, contented Butler looking back on young, diffident, restless Butler; old, dreary, unhappy Butler accounting for, justifying his dreariness and unhappiness. They had all been against him, all. What his father and mother had called love was really hate; what had started by being success had finished as failure, because of the machinations of his enemies. As in all reveries, the miraculous is brought into play to repair the consequences of folly and compensate for the triumphs of evil. Gold drops from heaven into Ernest's lap. It never dropped so into Butler's. He had to wait and wait, kick his heels for days outside a sick-room, sniff the autumn wind, until at last, when he was already old himself, he held his father's dead head between his hands.

The bitterness of *The Way of All Flesh* arises out of a sense of personal grievance. Butler had no general grievance. The constitution of society, its customs and standards of value, beliefs even, suited him very well. The last thing he would have wished would have been seriously to disturb them. Only a particular rectory had mishandled him, a particular clergyman was his father and a particular clergyman's wife his mother, and therefore he reviled rectories and clergymen and clergymen's wives. His hate lashed them, bringing their secret vices and vanities into the light, transforming even their virtues into monstrosities; but he remained to the end of his life a Broad Churchman of the advanced school, a good Conservative who believed *Mrs. Warren's Profession* to be a play no gentleman would have written, a solid citizen who paid his way, and who, when he had had



his watch-chain stolen, wrote a letter to *The Times* headed "Robbery in the Streets" and signed "A Victim."

In *The Way of All Flesh* he unfolded his whole life as he unfolded ideas in his books on evolution, tracing cause and effect, the origin of this and the origin of that. Theobald was an inevitable consequence of old Pontifex, Ernest of Theobald. Theobald and Christina, exuding themselves, formed a way of life—furniture, a rhythm of meals, talk, prayers, children. Ernest, one of the children, was part of this way of life. It oppressed him. He choked for breath in it. Yet how could he escape, since it was himself? Butler excused him on the ground that he had never had a proper chance. Through school and the university the mark of the beast was on him. Compounded of gracelessness, self-consciousness, diffidence, how could he be other than graceless and self-conscious and diffident? Even so, he sensed the existence of another sort of life; saw it embodied in radiant creatures walking along King's Parade; reached after it in Handel's music; marked it in the hang of trousers and the cut of coats.

Religion dragged him back into the darkness whence he had come, led his steps towards the poor and lowly and away from the rich and proud, confused his mind and disturbed his spirit as women brushing against him in Piccadilly Circus did. For a time he succumbed to religion, but never quite losing sight of the light, keeping alive in his soul a faint sense of shame at dwelling in darkness. At last salvation came. It is almost like D. H. Lawrence. He sent his Bible skidding across the floor, and made for Miss

Maitland's room. The trouble was she was not Lady Chatterley. If she had been, he might have been purified in flames of sensuality, and Butler have had to wait another generation for his fame. All the same, he was purified, but by being arrested for molesting a virtuous woman, and getting six months in the second division.

Ernest was purified. His eyes were henceforth set steadily on light and away from darkness. Leaning his head against the prison wall, he wept bitterly at having to renounce father and mother; but he had no alternative if he was to be received into the kingdom of light, they belonging to the kingdom of darkness, and inevitably, if he has any connection with them, dragging him into it with them. He even had to renounce Towneley because he must say things and write things that would offend him. Aunt Alethea's money lent a radiance to his person, gave him strength—strength sufficient even to stand up to Theobald and demolish him, though not, alas, to stand coolly by his mother's death-bed. He put the children Ellen bore him out to farm with a bargee, offering to buy them as many barges as they wanted, became mildly famous by publishing anonymously a volume of daring essays, and then allowed his fame to evaporate because he refused to propitiate the reviewers. Ernest and Overton coalesced. They were both Butler, and at the end of the book became one and indivisible, living in neighbouring chambers in an Inn of Court, going abroad together in the summer, reading each other's manuscripts, going together every Christmas to the pantomime at Drury Lane. The young, unhappy Butler became the elderly, complacent

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Butler, old Butler alone comfortable in young Butler's company, young Butler alone comfortable in old Butler's.

. . . . .

The character of George Pontifex, Ernest's grandfather, was based on Butler's own grandfather, Dr. Samuel Butler. He made him stand for success at its most abhorrent, an embodiment of the pomposity and hypocrisy which enable a man to impose himself on society, and to win its respect. His hatred of old Pontifex was less intense than his hatred of Theobald, because less personal, but in a way more contemptuous. There is something tragic about Theobald. He is shown to be a victim of circumstances over which he had no more control than Ernest had over the circumstances of his life. Old Pontifex, on the other hand, is the author of their joint misfortunes. He started off well, the son of an amiable village carpenter who made organs, and went to the bad deliberately, driving his son into the Church, making his children shiver in their shoes with threats of disinheriting them, creating the darkness which, until Aunt Alethea's £70,000 brought relief, enfolded Ernest's spirit.

In Butler's eyes the change from a village carpenter's son to a successful publisher of religious books with a large fortune to bequeath was by no means sheer gain. At the same time, he had to admit that, from old Pontifex's own point of view, it was sheer gain. He got what he wanted, and getting what he wanted made him happy; "it was a fine sight to see him tucking his napkin under the rosy old gills, and letting it fall over his capacious waistcoat, while the high light from

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the chandelier danced about the bump of benevolence on his bald old head like a star of Bethlehem." This prospering and happiness of the wicked, and failure and misery of the honest and pure in heart like himself worried him a lot, until, after he had stopped saying his prayers and had read *The Origin of Species*, he understood that such was the law of life:

"The righteous man will rob none but the defenceless,  
Whatsoever can reckon with him he will neither plunder  
nor kill;

He will steal an egg from a hen, or a lamb from an ewe,  
For his sheep and his hens cannot reckon with him  
hereafter—

They live not in any odour of defencefulness;  
Therefore right is with the righteous man, and he taketh  
advantage righteously,  
Praising God and plundering."

Then he became more complacent about it. Take old Pontifex, he argued; after all, "having lived to be nearly seventy-three years old and died rich, he must have been in very fair harmony with his surroundings. I have heard it said that such and such a person's life was a lie; but no man's life can be a very bad lie; as long as it continues at all it is at worst nine-tenths of it true. Mr. Pontifex's life not only continued a long time, but was prosperous right up to the end. Is not this enough?" It was true that he bullied his children so thoroughly that they were fit for nothing and instinctively bullied their own likewise, bringing a melancholy, tormented, graceless brood into the world; true, too, that he was pompous, insensitive, complacent, mean, grasping, purse-proud, hypocritical, almost everything that Butler most disliked; all the same he lived "long and

prosperously," left "numerous offspring, to all of whom he communicated not only his physical and mental characteristics, with no more than the usual amount of modification, but also no small share of characteristics which are less easily transmitted—I mean his pecuniary characteristics. It may be said that he acquired these by sitting still and letting money run, as it were, right up against him; but against how many does not money run who do not take it when it does, or who, even if they hold it for a little while, cannot so incorporate it with themselves that it shall descend through them to their offspring? Mr. Pontifex did this. He kept what he may be said to have made, and money is like a reputation for ability—more easily made than kept."

Butler was inclined to look tolerantly on his grandfather because he had accumulated the money that he was to have, and had already, by conveniently dying, passed it on. If only his father had done likewise, he would probably have looked tolerantly on him. Dr. Butler's superiority to Canon Butler lay, as far as Butler was concerned, in the fact that he was dead, and so not an impediment to Butler's having the spending of his money. It was Canon Butler's longevity that maddened him, tantalising winter after tantalising winter, tantalising journeys to and from Shrewsbury, tantalising non-committal letters from his sisters, tantalisingly inadequate information about whether the diseases Canon Butler had were likely or not to be fatal. Towards his grandfather he grew steadily more tolerant, and when, in 1889, his sisters sent him all Dr. Butler's papers, he "fell in love

with him," publishing his two volume *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* in 1896 as a monument to the great man's memory. This new attitude of mind quite threw out of joint the characterisation of old Pontifex; and Butler had the intention of revising the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh* in such a way that Ernest's grandfather would appear as noble as his father base.

He never, however, did this. It would have been a tidy job making the old man, instead of an embodiment of every vice, with only the one redeeming virtue of acquiring and keeping money, a pattern of forbearance and loving kindness. Some idea of what *The Way of All Flesh*, re-written as he intended to re-write it, would have been like can be got from comparing certain passages in *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* with corresponding passages in the novel. The following, for instance, is a description of Dr. Samuel Butler by a certain Reverend C. Clark quoted by Butler with approval:

"(Dr. Butler) was . . . a grand and noble gentleman, fitted to fill with respect, affection or awe the rising generation of the upper middle classes of a country like this. A liberal, but no pedantic admirer of classical literature, of accurate but very extensive reading amongst the ancients, and making this knowledge subservient to the purposes of a practical life; interesting his pupils by the varied stores of apt illustration which he brought to bear upon their varied pursuits. Withal a Christian gentleman of generous sentiments, conscious of his own



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powers, and not intolerant of the mistakes of other men. Need I say, after this, that he was large of frame, handsome of person, and clean shorn? ”

Mr. Pontifex, on the other hand:—

“ thrashed his boys two or three times a week and some weeks a good deal oftener. . . . Like other rich men at the beginning of this century he ate and drank a good deal more than was enough to keep him in health. Even his excellent constitution was not proof against a prolonged course of overfeeding and what we should now consider overdrinking. His liver would not infrequently get out of order, and he would come down to breakfast looking yellow about the eyes. . . . On these, his black days, he would take very gloomy views of things and say to himself that in spite of all his goodness to them his children did not love him. But who can love any man whose liver is out of order? How base, he would exclaim to himself, was such ingratitude! How especially hard upon himself, who had been such a model son, and always honoured and obeyed his parents though they had not spent one hundredth part of the money upon him which he had lavished upon his own children. . . . At other times when not quite well he would have them in for the fun of shaking his will at them. He would in his imagination cut them all out one after the other, and leave his money to found alms-houses, till at last

he was obliged to put them back, so that he might have the pleasure of cutting them out the next time that he was in a passion."

Not only did Butler "fall in love with" his grandfather, he also fell in love with Dr. Butler's achievements—that is, with Shrewsbury School, so that Roughborough would have required considerable modification as well as old Pontifex. There is a remarkable chapter in *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* entitled "Dr. Butler's Last Speech Day," which gives a very sympathetic and full account of the encomiums on Dr. Butler's work at the last speech day over which he presided. In the course of his own speech, Dr. Butler said that he did not "desire to leave the school in better hands . . . nor with a set of better disposed, more studious or more promising boys in it." It was Dr. Kennedy, the Dr. Skinner of *The Way of all Flesh*, in whose hands he left the school; and as for the promising boys—Butler traced out the careers of the boys who were at the head of the school in that year (1836), and asks: "Is it likely that any other school of the time can show a greater, if indeed an equal measure of success?" Amongst the twenty-two names he gives, bishops, professors, masters of colleges abound; there is also a Commissioner of Wrecks and H. Thring, who was "raised to the peerage."

Dr. Skinner, too, would have required a good deal of tinkering. He is one of the best-drawn characters in *The Way of All Flesh*, a heavy-handed, pedantic ignoramus: "Could it be expected to enter into the head of such a man as this," Butler asks, "that in reality he was making

money by corrupting youth; that it was his paid profession to make the worse appear the better reason in the eyes of those who were too young and inexperienced to be able to find him out; that he kept out of the sight of those whom he professed to teach material points of the argument, for the production of which they had a right to rely upon the honour of anyone who made professions of sincerity; that he was a passionate half-turkey-cock half-gander of a man whose sallow, bilious face and hobble-gobble voice could scare the timid, but who would take to his heels if he were met firmly; that his *Meditations upon Jude*, such as they were, were cribbed without acknowledgment, and would have been beneath contempt if so many people did not believe them to have been written honestly?" This would not have been easy to transform into Dr. Kennedy, under whom Butler was six years at Shrewsbury, "and from the bottom of my heart can say that he treated me with great forbearance—far more than I deserved," who "lost nothing of what he found at Shrewsbury save only numbers; and this loss, as I have already said, was due to causes in no way connected with himself," who had the wisdom to make no marked change of system or discipline as they were under Dr. Butler, and therefore "was able to surpass his predecessor in the proportion of his academic successes."

As for the school itself—in 1886 Butler wrote a note, and in 1898 revised it, to the effect that he never liked Shrewsbury nor got much good from it; in *The Life and Letters of Dr. Butler* he writes: "One word more before I close my account of Dr. Butler's career at Shrewsbury. His spirit

has never left it. If I were asked what I flattered myself upon as being the pre-eminent virtues of Shrewsbury, I should say sincerity, downrightness, hatred of sham, love of work and a strong sense of duty. What little of these noble qualities I dare pretend to, I owe hardly more to my parents than to the school at which they placed me, nor do I believe that Shrewsbury would have possessed them in the measure in which they certainly existed amongst my school-fellows but for the deep impress of Dr. Butler's masculine and sagacious character. That the impress has not been dimmed by those who have succeeded him is my firm and comfortable belief. That it never may be dimmer than it now is, is my fervent hope; and so let me repeat the last words of Dr. Butler as Head Master—*Floreat Salopia!* ”

“I owe hardly more to my parents. . . .” It suggests that if only Canon Butler had died a few years sooner, so that Butler had been able to lay hands on his money when he felt the greatest need of it, he might have “fallen in love” with him as well as with his grandfather, and transformed *The Way of All Flesh* into an epic of domestic felicity, with old Pontifex as the kindly patriarch, anxious for the welfare of his children and grandchildren, and quite ready to die and bequeath them his money at the most convenient moment, with Theobald and Christina implanting in Ernest “hardly more” than Roughborough “sincerity, downrightness, hatred of sham, love of work, and a strong sense of duty,” with Dr. Skinner, forbearing, and worthily continuing the noble traditions he received from his predecessor, and with Ernest, instead of losing

his money, and trying to molest Miss Maitland, and finding his way to prison, having a career comparable with that of any of the twenty-one head boys at Shrewsbury in Dr. Butler's last year.

*The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* was an olive branch, an offer of peace that Butler held out. Would not dons, after such sweetness, take him to their bosoms? Would not the Establishment open its doors to him after so earnestly singing its praises? Would not Shrewsbury School itself, and St. John's College, and Cambridge University, reconsider their verdict about himself and his work, recognising that, far from being a dynamiter of the established order, he was one of its pillars, and eager to declare himself as such? To a certain extent, these hopes were realised. "I think I told you," he wrote to Hans Faesch, regarding the reception of *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler*, "that the Queen has been graciously pleased to desire that her best thanks should be conveyed to me. The Master and Fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge, have also been pleased to pass a special vote of thanks for the copy I sent them. Mr. Gladstone sent me a postcard of which I enclose a copy; I do not want it again. The old gentleman evidently liked the book." This was a pretty good bag—the Queen, the Master and Fellows of Johns, Mr. Gladstone.

Butler published all his books except *Erewhon Revisited* at his own expense. He never got a publisher to carry any of the risk; indeed, often had difficulty in finding a publisher even when

he was prepared to pay himself. Yet, however pressed for money he might be, he continued to pay for their publication. For them and Pauli he was never able to deny himself the pleasure of paying. Of course, he hoped that each one would bring him in a good return, as he hoped that Pauli would, writing to his father that events would ultimately prove his worldly wisdom in financing him. His letters to Miss Savage were always sanguine about the prospects of the particular book he happened to be engaged upon.

An author whose first book sold several thousands, as *Erewhon* did, had every reason to suppose that he would have no difficulty in getting his second published on fairly advantageous terms; and Butler was convinced that it was his quarrel with Darwin, and his unorthodox opinions generally, which had set publishers against him. This is difficult to believe. Publishers are not, as a rule, squeamish in such matters. Their business is to sell books, and it is a matter of indifference to them whether the books they sell detract from or embellish established reputations. They know, none better, that there is profit to be made equally from the zealous upholding of contemporary opinion and its zealous demolition, and that the public enjoys both being flattered and rebuked, if rebuked, the harder and more vociferously the better. Plenty of books were published contemporaneously with Butler's at the publisher's risk, and had good sales, which tore to pieces greater reputations than Butler's did, and put forward far more subversive opinions than his.

From the purely business point of view, the



publishers who refused to publish Butler's books were amply justified in the light of their sales. Not one of them, except *Erewhon*, would have nearly paid for itself. There is a sort of amateurishness, querulousness about them, as though of a man with a perpetual and irritating grievance. This applies particularly to *Ex Voto* and *Alps and Sanctuaries*, which was written under contract for David Boque, Butler to receive £100, though when it was finished Boque declined to publish, so that in the end, like the other books, it was published at Butler's expense. Both *Ex Voto* and *Alps and Sanctuaries*, according to Gilbert Cannon, "inspired guide books," abound in passages like: "Jones, talking with me once . . . said, 'Oh, that Men should put an enemy into their brains to steal away their hearts!'" At any rate he and I have written *Narcissus* on these principles, and are not without hope that what it has lost in erudition it may have gained in freshness." Who is Jones? a publisher's reader must have wondered; and what is *Narcissus*? Who is going to take seriously the proposition that Tabachetti is incomparably greater than Michael Angelo, or to wade through long chapters heavily demolishing obscure guide books?

How was it, then, that the curve of Butler's literary reputation, which steadily sagged from *Erewhon* to *Erewhon Revisited*, revived so suddenly and reached such great heights after his death? It was *The Way of All Flesh* that did the trick; and if Butler had lived long enough to carry out his intention of conforming old Pontifex with the Dr. Butler he had fallen in love with, the "Christian gentleman of generous sentiments," and

Roughborough with the Shrewsbury to which, "hardly more than to my parents" he owed what little he possessed of the noble qualities of "sincerity, downrightness, hatred of sham, love of work and a strong sense of duty," it might not have done the trick at all. *The Way of All Flesh*, like *The Origin of Species*, said what a large number of people wanted said; and the fact that Shaw went out of his way to praise it so highly, and was himself a practising creative evolutionist, gave it just the necessary *cachet* of unrespectability. People were yearning to be relieved of the burden of family relationships, which, since their religious sanction had gone, had become irksome. They wanted someone to tell them that, not only was it not wrong to detest their mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers (not yet wife; that a later harvest), but right and proper, advanced, fashionable; they wanted to feel that, far from being undutiful, they were victims of an oppressive and cruel system, which only their particular virtue had enabled them to survive. *The Way of All Flesh* made them feel this. They were all little Ernests being blighted by Theobald's bullying and Christina's gushing falsity. Butler's self-pity became universalised, and a generation fed on it. His kind of facetiousness, his infinite respect for money, his belief in supermen and in progress, his insistence on the possibility of hymns without God, his earnest unbelief, the fact that during his lifetime he had been scorned and rejected of men, his parade of intellectual honesty and of horror of self-deception, his oddity and aloofness from the personalities and currents of opinion of his day, his unshakeable conviction that on a basis of buying milk rather

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than keeping a cow a satisfying, secure pattern for living could be built up—all ministered to the needs of the post-Victorians.

From *The Way of All Flesh* they turned to his other writings, and found them abounding in good things. The *Note Books* were published; they, too, full of droll digs against ridiculous clergymen, droll praise of the outstanding reality of crisp five-pound notes and good-looking men in well-cut, expensive clothes, droll deflations of massive reputations. Once started, there was Jones to keep the ball rolling; and Butlerians multiplied as followers of Sunchildism multiplied after Higgs's departure from Erewhon.

## VII

### THE SEAR, THE YELLOW LEAF

"This time he was biting his middle finger and talking cruelly to himself."—(*Ramblings in Cheapside*).

IN *The Fair Haven*, *The Way of All Flesh* and the evolution books, Butler was trying to worry out personal problems and to work off personal grudges; ultimately hereached Ernest's position—"All he wanted . . . was to know which it was to be—that is to say, whether a system was possible or not, and, if possible then what the system was to be. Having found out that no system based on absolute certainty was possible he was contented." When Ernest puts this proposition up to Overton, and Overton points out that with a good deal of mental storm and stress he has only arrived at a conclusion that sensible people reach without bothering their brains at all, Ernest says: "I see it all now. The people like Towneley are the only ones who know anything that is worth knowing, and like that of course I can never be. But to make the Towneleys possible there must be hewers of wood and drawers of water—men in fact through whom conscious knowledge must pass before it can reach those who can apply it gracefully and instinctively as the Towneleys can. I am a hewer of wood, but if I accept the position frankly and do not set up to be a Towneley it does not matter." Henceforth, therefore, in his writing he confines himself

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to "subjects concerning which an increase in our knowledge was possible."

Butler found plenty of such subjects—pictures to identify, origins of obscure artists to trace out, little-known churches and monuments to describe, a new method of translation to apply, discoveries about the *Odyssey* and the *Sonnets* to expound. As for questions relating to conduct, he believed that as long as there were people like Pauli in the world to set a fashion in behaviour, which, they being so attractive, others would naturally follow, he need not bother with them—assuming, of course, that he was properly provided with money. Until he became so he did have to bother about behaviour, just as, before Aunt Alethea's £70,000 came his way, Ernest had to live out his squalid period of keeping a second-hand clothes shop and being married to a drunken wife. Thenceforth it was plain sailing. Thanks to "London and North-Western shares nearly doubling themselves" he became "richer than ever," through sheer inability to spend his income "was obliged to hoard in self-defence," could bury every personal problem that cropped up under five-pound notes, and, in the protective shadow of London and North-Western shares, be absolutely free to devote himself to subjects concerning which an increase in our knowledge was possible.

One of these subjects was the authorship of the *Odyssey*. Butler became convinced that the poem was written by a woman, and this gave him the occasion for many journeys to Sicily, launched him off on his admirable prose translations of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, and ultimately bore fruit in *The Authoress of the*

*Odyssey*, which sets out to prove that "the *Odyssey* was written entirely at, and drawn entirely from, the place now called Trapani on the west coast of Sicily, alike as regards the Phæacian and the Ithaca scenes," and "that the poem was entirely written by a very young woman, who lived at the place now called Trapani, and introduced herself into the work under the name of Nausicaa." In his little book, *Samuel Butler and the Odyssey*, Mr. B. Farrington, lecturer in classics at Cape Town University, takes the view that Butler amply proved both these propositions; Mr. Farrington holds, therefore, that Butler's *The Authoress of the Odyssey* is "the most important book on the *Odyssey* that has ever been written."

Although in the latter part of his life Butler confined himself exclusively to increasing knowledge rather than, as at first, searching after some truth whereby he might live, the old controversial Adam still lived in him. He still laid about him with a heavy hand, whether against Shakespearean or classical scholars, or writers of guide-books, or art and literary and musical critics. "I never write on any subject," he wrote in 1899, "unless I believe the opinion of those who have the ear of the public to be mistaken, and this involves, as a necessary consequence, that every book I write runs counter to the men who are in possession of the field; hence I am always in hot water." After his generously conceived olive branch in *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler*, he never tried again to buy himself into favour with concessions. Like Ernest, he reconciled himself to being outside the literary clique, and found his compensation, as far as he was able, in setting them



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by the ears, secure in the knowledge that whatever they might do he would be able to go on writing books for whose publications, thanks to the London and North-Western Railway, he was rich enough to go on paying, and more and more taking refuge in the conviction that his day would come after he was dead, that, like Shakespeare's, his real life would begin when his mortal one had ended.

Until Mrs. Jones died, he had at least one faithful admirer and disciple and helper, Jones. Jointly they dedicated themselves to the subjects concerning which an increase in our knowledge was possible, went hand in hand in search of the authoress of the *Odyssey*, marvelled together at Butler's "beautiful passages," conscientiously looked at, sketched and classified antiquities, were indignant in unison at the chilly reception given to the treasures they poured into the reading and musical public's lap. One subject in which an increase in our knowledge was possible had to do with the figures of two soldiers in a Deposition Chapel. They had been made out of two old statues of Adam and Eve, and the question was which of the soldiers had been made out of Eve and which out of Adam. On theoretical grounds Butler and Jones decided that "the soldier with a moustache and real drapery was Adam, and the other soldier with long hair and armour was Eve. Eve was bigger than Adam, which was wrong, and she had no breasts to speak of, but that might have been because neither Cain nor Abel was yet born. Her breast had been painted to represent armour in silver scales, which stopped short of her girdle, her intervening belly being painted blue, like an

ancient Briton." In the evening, when the Chapel was deserted, they decided—conscientious investigators—to test their theoretical conclusions, and Jones, with a smirk, pulled up the two soldiers' clothes and found that he and Butler had been wrong in the morning.

Thus they added to our knowledge, afterwards being entertained at a banquet in their honour, twenty-six guests, "all the swells." Butler was put at the head of the table, and his health proposed. He replied, later on making another speech, even Jones being allowed to make a speech, but only "about five words." They both beamed with enjoyment sitting there the honoured guests of twenty-six swells, if a bitter thought came to them thinking: Truly a prophet is not without honour except in his own country; then proceeded to Alagna, where they were given a double-bedded room, and neither of them slept, because Butler was afraid that if he slept he would snore and disturb Jones, and Jones that if he slept Butler would snore and he not be able to wake him, as Butler had instructed him to do, and Butler therefore be annoyed. In the morning the chambermaid brought in coffee, over each counterpane a beard hung, the air rather heavy from the two of them having breathed it all night, both slightly irritable, wondering about their tooth-brushes, wondering, now that the Adam and Eve question had been settled, how they would add to our knowledge that day.

In *The Authoress of the Odyssey* there are signs of senility; Butler's whole attitude to Nausicaa is like that of elderly, abstemious men towards a

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pretty adolescent girl, so headstrong, they think, such a wild, determined creature, and follow her about with their eyes, and smile tolerantly, and shake their old heads, are very gallant and droll, and love to pull her pretty arm through theirs, and, as though by accident, to let their hands rest on her pretty shoulders. In his last book, *Erewhon Revisited*, he fell back into the morass of sentimentality that he had been struggling without success all his life to get out of, abandoning every restraint, just letting himself go. *Erewhon* was a chuckle, most of the other books a snarl, and *Erewhon Revisited* is a *cri du cœur*. Returning after many years to the country that had seemed so enthralling looked at from his New Zealand homestead, when he was exhilarated from having stopped saying his prayers and with *The Origin of Species* stirring in his mind, he again looked down on Erewhon, and saw it now as a place of mists and shadows, not sparkling with ideas, thought winding like silver rivers through its rich fertility, innumerable hills to be climbed, each with a delectable prospect; misted over now with frustrated hopes and cancelled appetites, wherein stalked the ghosts of all the different sorts of fulfilment he had never had—a *manqué* land. He looked down, an old man soon to die, on Erewhon and wept.

As Mr. Kingsmill says in his brilliant essay on Butler in *After Puritanism*, "Higgs, returning to Erewhon twenty years or so after his first visit, is no longer Higgs but Butler in search of a son." In *The Way of All Flesh* Butler looked back on his unhappy childhood, pointing out the joys he had missed, the heavy disabilities under which he had laboured, the manner in which,

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through no fault of his own, he had been lamed and cramped from the very beginning, and venomously blamed where he thought blame was due; in *Erewhon Revisited* he looked back on his unhappy life, knowing it was soon to end, for the first time throwing overboard the pretence that his pattern for living had brought him contentment, and weaving a fantastic, pitiable romance out of its inadequacy. It was probably the desertion of Jones which bred this quite new mood in him. He had clung to Jones as tottering monarchs cling to some particular favourite, satisfying themselves with his assurances that all is well, indifferent who falls away as long as he remains, and then, when he fails them, realising in a sudden rush that all is lost.

Higgs returned to England with Arowhena, and had a son by her there named John. For many years he was poor, earning his living as a pavement artist. Then the inevitable happened. He being Butler, it had to happen. An uncle died in Australia bequeathing him a large fortune. Soon after Higgs became affluent Arowhena died, and Higgs, feeling restless, decided to revisit Erewhon. He went the same journey over the range, found the same statues chanting Handel as the wind blew through them, only this time the snow stopped up their mouths. He put on his old Erewhonian costume, and filled his pockets with gold, it and Handel being the only two commodities current both in Erewhon and the outside world, the only two universals, but found to his surprise when he ran into Professors Hanky and Panky that the clothes he had been wearing when he first visited Erewhon

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were now *de rigueur* there. From the Professors he learnt of Sunchildism, a religion founded on his miraculous balloon ascent with Arbwhena, and now fully equipped with, for scriptures, his reputed sayings, with a ritual, temples, a priesthood, all the usual appurtenances of a religion. Butler had long wanted to show how "myth, attended both by zealous good-faith on the part of some and by chicane on the part of others, would be very naturally developed in consequence of a supposed miracle, such as a balloon ascent would be to a people who knew nothing about such things." Higgs's escape, like Christ's resurrection, was not in the least miraculous; yet from the one Sunchildism and from the other Christianity "almost inexorably" followed. When, however, he was accused of poking fun at Christianity and its founder in *Erewhon Revisited* he indignantly denied that he had intended any such thing, though he wrote to Bernard Shaw: "Longmans have had the MS. nearly a month and will not publish it even at my expense; they say it will give offence to their connection amongst the High Anglican party—which I should think not improbable, for it is far more wicked than *Erewhon*."

All this part of the book is thin, like an aged acrobat wearily going through his old tricks; the heart of it is in the second leading idea, which, Butler complained in a letter to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, "no reviewer has noticed—I mean the story of a father trying to win the love of a hitherto unknown son, by risking his life in order to show himself worthy of it—and succeeding." Here he really does let himself go. It is pure melodrama. Having gathered from

the Professor some idea of the changes that have taken place in Erewhon since he went away, Higgs returned to where he had hidden his own clothes, put them on and made his way to the town where formerly he had been imprisoned. Going there he ran into the Head Ranger, whom he at once recognised as his son, begotten as a result of an illicit encounter with Yram, the daughter of the gaoler who had been in charge of him; "he had the greatest difficulty in hiding his emotion, for the lad was indeed one of whom any father might be proud. He longed to be able to embrace him and claim him for what he was, but this, as he well knew, might not be." As he told his other son, John, about this, "the tears again welled into his eyes," and he said: "Don't be jealous, my dearest boy. I love you quite as dearly as I love him, or better, but he was sprung upon me so suddenly, and dazzled me with his comely debonair face, so full of youth and health and frankness." John was dark, like Arowhena and like Butler.

Higgs's son by Yram is named George Strong. He is the last version of the Nice Person, with considerably more of the domestic virtues than Towneley had, but lower class, not blessed with either riches or orphanhood, a loving son of loving middle-class parents, with a lot of other children and no invested capital. As Higgs walked along with him he asked leading questions about Sunchildism, for which George appeared to have no great regard. After all, Higgs argued, "even though Higgs himself were to return and tell it from the housetops that he was a mortal—ay, and a very common one—he would be killed but not believed."



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"Let him come, let him show himself, speak out, die, if the people choose to kill him," George said in his manly way. "In that case I would forgive him, accept him for my father, as silly people say he is, and honour him to my dying day."

Higgs was deeply impressed by this; "smiling, in spite of emotion so strong that he could hardly bring the words out of his mouth," he asked: "Would it be a bargain?" George said it would, and Higgs asked him to shake hands on it, which he did.

After this they changed the subject, and talked about family matters. Higgs's feelings kept breaking through, as when, after George had told him that Yram had four sons and three daughters, he whipped off his hat and said: "May all health and happiness attend her and you, and all of you, henceforth and for ever." George showed a certain amount of surprise at such fervour about strangers, but Higgs got out of the difficulty by saying that he reminded him "of a son who was stolen from me when he was a child." Later he amended this, and said to George: "It is not my son alone that you resemble. You resemble all who love truth and hate lies, as I do." This time he remained covered.

Yram turned out to have grown into a very clever woman, and had married the local mayor. As soon as she heard from the Professors that a stranger had been seen in the neighbourhood of the statues she decided that it must have been Higgs, and that she had better tell George who his father was. So she saw George, and after some preparation said to him that Higgs, the

Sunchild, was "father to that boy whom I love next to my husband more dearly than anyone in the whole world." Then she "folded her arms round him for a second, without kissing him," and left him to go and have a cry. When she came back from having her cry, she gave him details, describing how Higgs was brought to the prison, how "if I had let him alone he would have done the like by me; and let each other alone we did, till the day before he was taken down to the capital," and how, on that day, "whether through his fault or mine I know not—we neither of us meant it . . . we took it into our heads that we were broken-hearted lovers. The rest followed." Any consequent awkwardness was avoided by Mrs. Humdrum, an amiable old lady who put the matter up to Strong. Strong's line was that he would marry Yram; only "I ought not to be denied anything that has been allowed to Higgs." Mrs. Humdrum was quite equal to dealing with this situation. "Come to my house this evening," she said, "and you will find Yram there." He came, went to bed with Yram, and a fortnight later married her. George's reaction was to smile, "but very gravely," and to say: "How much does not all this explain!" The affair turned out well for Strong, because after he had married Yram Mr. Humdrum took him into partnership, and then died, leaving him head of the firm. Strong, Yram said, used to say laughingly that all his success in life had been due to her and Higgs. Here George remarked "thoughtfully": "I shall give Mrs. Humdrum a double dose of kissing next time I see her." "Oh, do, do; she will so like it," Yram answered. The scene

closes with Yram saying: "And now, my darling boy, tell your poor mother whether or no you can forgive her," and George clasping her in his arms, kissing her again and again and saying: "Of course I do."

A huge new temple was to be dedicated in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the Sunchild's departure; and Higgs attended the dedication service. The sermon was preached by Professor Hanky, who had been told by Yram that the Sunchild in person was to be a member of his congregation. She told him this because she thought it was her duty, he being her guest. Higgs sat next to George, and at a certain stage in the service felt inspired by his son to declare himself. It was fortunate that he was sitting next to George, because otherwise Hanky would have had him burnt at the stake; as it was George arrested him and hurried him off to prison, where he was received in the most friendly way by his old gaoler, Yram's father, and had a conversation with George, who, to his inexpressible delight, seemed pleased to be his son. "What have I done," he muttered, "to deserve so much goodwill? I have done you nothing but harm." George "patted him gently on the arm" to soothe him. It was on this occasion that they changed boots. "In passing," John Higgs remarks, "I may say that George never got his own boots back again, though he tried more than once to do so. My father always made some excuse. They were the only memento of George that he brought home with him: I wonder that he did not ask for a lock of his hair, but he did not. He had the boots put against a wall in his bedroom,

where he could see them from his bed, and during his illness, while consciousness still remained with him, I saw his eyes continually turn towards them. George, in fact, dominated him as long as anything in the world could do so. Nor do I wonder; on the contrary, I love his memory the better; for I too . . . have seen George, and whatever little jealousy I may have felt vanished on my finding him almost instantaneously gain the same ascendancy over me, his brother, as he gained over my father."

There were certain complications owing to Hanky's determination to get Higgs killed as a foreign devil, but George managed to deal with him, and finally an amicable compromise was agreed on, whereby Higgs was to make a public declaration that he was not the Sunchild, and immediately after leave the country. With this settled, Yram visited him in prison, taking with her a "basket of the best cold dainties she could find and a bottle of choice wine." Higgs, when he saw her, could only "bow his head and cover his face with his hands." Yram was extremely sensible. She poured him out a glass of wine, and said: "All is well. I love my husband with my whole heart and soul, and he loves me with his." When she told Higgs the arrangements that had been made about him, he pulled out nine small bags of gold nuggets that he had brought with him, and said they were for George. As Butler gave all his friends gold, so Higgs, his heart full to overflowing with love for George, immediately turned to his nine little bags of gold nuggets to express it. He also explained that he had got a number of gold sovereigns hidden near the statues, and that George was to have these

too, and to melt them down. Later on he arranged with Strong to have a lot more gold brought into Erewhon for George. Yram said that the gold would come in very handy, because George and a granddaughter of Mrs. Humdrum's had been "sworn lovers ever since he was ten and she eight," and that now Higgs had made him rich they would be able to get married. When Yram left him she put out her hand, which Higgs took, and in another moment was gone, "for she saw a look in his face as though he would fain have asked her to let him once more press his lips to hers. Had he done this, without thinking about it, it is likely enough she would not have been ill-pleased."

Before Higgs left Erewhon he was entertained to lunch and dinner at the Mayor's house. When he met Strong he said apropos of Strong's marrying Yram when she was with child by him: "Had I been in your place I should be glad to hope I might have done as you did."

"And I," the Mayor jovially replied, "fear that if I had been in yours I should have made it the proper thing to do."

Higgs was presented to Yram's other children. The youngest, "a lad of fourteen, walked straight up to him, put out his hand and said: 'How do you do, sir?' with a pretty blush that went straight to Higgs's heart. 'These boys,' he said to Yram aside, 'who have nothing to blush for—see how the blood mantles into their young cheeks, while I, who should blush at being spoken to by them, cannot do so.' " His feelings reached a climax when he went upstairs to rest and found on his dressing-table "a small unpretending box, which he immediately opened. On

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the top was a paper with the words, 'Look—say nothing—forget.' Beneath this was some cotton wool, and then—the two buttons and the lock of his own hair that he had given Yram when he said good-bye to her. . . . He took her little missive, and under 'look,' he wrote, 'I have'; under 'say nothing,' 'I will'; under 'forget,' 'never.' " It would be interesting to know what Butler would have said if his mother had indulged fancies of this sort.

George saw Higgs to the statues, and they took an affectionate farewell of one another. Higgs went home to die, and a year later his son John staggered up to the statues with £2,000 in gold on his back, which he laid at George's feet. George took him by storm as he had taken Higgs by storm: "before I had been with him more than a few minutes I felt as though I had known and loved him all my life. And the dog fawned on him as though he felt just as I did." Later on Erewhon was opened up to foreigners, the railway started again and the brothers were able to meet easily. By that time George had become Prime Minister and very rich.

Thus Erewhon became just like anywhere else, Mrs. Humdrum, the same person as the goddess Ygrun, or Mrs. Grundy, not a pest but saintly, even Sunchildism tolerable because it provided a peg on which the "best ethical and spiritual conceptions" could be hung; thus Butler peopled his last loneliness with George, on whom even dogs fawned; with Yram, her smile always quick and ready, tact perfect as her catering; with Strong, a muscular Christian; with Mrs. Humdrum, looking round her benignly, not envious of youth or fearful of death, only wanting every-



thing to be amicably adjusted and 'as far as possible to stay the same; thus at the end Butler preached the full Victorian gospel of radiant upper middle-class domesticity as he would have preached it in *The Way of All Flesh* if he had had time to re-write it after falling in love with his grandfather. His life grew more and more unreal as he grew older, and so did his thought, and so did his visions, until at last, in *Erewhon Revisited*, he lost the only reality that remained with him—his hate. Then indeed there was nothing, except of course the nine little bags of nuggets, and the sovereigns that could be melted down, and the £2,000 in gold that John Higgs staggered up to the statues with to give to his brother George.

How happy I am! Butler thought, an old man, as he sat alone in his room in Clifford's Inn. It was night time. Mr. Cathie had gone long since; Jones had come into his mother's money and so spent his evenings elsewhere; Pauli was dead, and Miss Savage, and Canon Butler, and Mrs. Butler. Even Madame was dead. He had watched earth being piled on her dead body. Buried underground her body was no longer available even if he paid a pound. Good! he thought. Good! Nothing and no one to disturb him. The room was quiet, and he was quiet. How happy I am! he thought, sitting quiet and alone in the quiet room.

What should he do? He might paint—another self-portrait, staring at himself in a mirror. The piano invited, Handel tingling in his fingers, ringing through the emptiness of his being like

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organ notes through an empty cathedral. Or there was his work, notes he had jotted down that day—heading “Death”—“The main trouble is that it is an end. All ends are unpleasant. Suppose birth the end of life and vice versa. Fancy beginning life as a corpse and ending as an ovum! Fancy ending with a happy childhood!” He chuckled. How happy I am! he thought, not having to keep a cow, with enough money invested in gilt-edged securities to buy milk, guaranteed sterilised.

He would work, sort out the result of four hours of foraging in the British Museum. Papers spread out in front of him, he began. He was working at the Sonnets. Or had he finished with the Sonnets long ago and forgotten? He recited one or two, having, in his conscientious way, learnt them all by heart—

“Our love was new and then but in the spring  
When I was wont to greet it with my lays.”

His eyes filled with tears as he remembered a “white heat of devotion” that endured for many years, floods of tears, anxious, hopeless waiting for a Pauli who never came, the iniquity of it all, the squalid, miserable end in a champagne funeral lunch. Our love was new and then but in the spring. How happy I am! he thought, working away at the Sonnets.

The story was so clear. How strange, when it was so clear, that no one else should have understood! He clothed himself in Shakespeare’s flesh, and the lineaments of Mr. W. H. stood out clearly—plump face with bristling side-whiskers, self-indulgent mouth, blistered tongue, the handsomest man God ever sent into San Francisco.

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The Sonnets told the tale of his love for Pauli, nobility loving what was ignoble, fawning on what was ignoble, cheating himself yet still longing, longing; the cruel plot, having to travel forth without his cloak to the sound of raucous laughter, lamed by fortune's dearest spite, Pauli's spite. It was so clear, so clear. He rubbed his hands delightedly together—too happy, happy Butler—this also grist for his mill, as were the contortions of Madame's cat as he unlaced his boots, nursing a pound in his hand, Madame's *douceur*—*douceur de l'âme*.

His delight was interrupted as he remembered—they, his enemies, would scorn his theory of the Sonnets as they had scorned all his other theories. There was a conspiracy to down him—first his father, then Darwin, then innumerable others. They were all against him, all. His eyes filled with tears again as he thought of himself, back to the wall, facing them. Never mind, he would show fight. What would make them smart? How have at them? Phrases occurred to him; hate animated him. As he hated his mind turned back to the source of all his suffering, to the two who, tainted with Langar, had begotten him, fashioned him out of timidity and unease and sullen unhappiness, made him partake of their natures, denied him the one protection he needed—money, egged on his enemies and refused to share in his triumphs, even to read his books.

How happy I am! Butler thought as he fetched out the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh*, enjoying once more Ernest's triumph when, got up regardless of expense, he put out his hand and said laughingly—laughingly! there the ecstasy

of his revenge—to his father: “I am afraid you do not know that Mr. Overton has handed over to me Aunt Alethea’s money;” still laughing—“My aunt left it to him in trust for me, not in trust either for you or my Uncle John—and it has accumulated till it is now over £70,000.”

He died in a nursing-home in St. John’s Wood, in a heavy, solemn room, rather like the rooms in the Rectory at Langar, where Mr. Cathie had brought him from Naples. Though Butler had refused to have Jones sent for, he turned up at St. John’s Wood for the death. Butler was propped up in bed, Jones on one side Mr. Cathie on the other. It was a fine June evening, and he thought it must be a dark morning, the sort of dark November morning when it took him longer than usual to make his way from Clifford’s Inn to the British Museum, when the company in the reading room was sparser than usual and the lights had to be turned on. He put on his spectacles, hoping that they would help him to see better; then, when they didn’t, brushed them off with a petulant, despairing gesture; made to get out of bed, asked: “Have you brought the cheque-book, Alfred?” and, without waiting for an answer, stopped breathing. In *The Way of All Flesh* old Pontifex, the carpenter, Theobald’s grandfather, watches the sunset on the night he dies and murmurs: “Good-bye, sun. Good-bye, sun.” With Butler it was: “Good-bye, cheque-book. Good-bye, cheque-book.”

With most people there is a particular place that exactly suits them. You see them in it and

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at once recognise that it exactly suits them, ever afterwards think of them as being there. Moreover, having seen them in this place, having recognised its aptness, somehow illuminates their character, as a sudden gesture or expression will. You see a man at a religious service, or in a bar, or on a platform at a public meeting; notice how, in these circumstances, his being is at its easiest, most rich, and henceforth know him for what he is, never think of him except as worshipping, or drinking in a bar, or sitting on a public platform. In the case of Butler, the place that exactly suited him was the reading-room of the British Museum. There, as far as he was concerned, the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest; there he spent many, many happy hours, amongst that curious company, so like him, turning over the pages of books, moving silently to and from the catalogues, whispering questions to the librarians, the light even on the brightest summer day subdued, towards the evening the little lamps coming on one by one like stars. He took his ideas to the reading-room of the British Museum to worry them out, noted down the thoughts that occurred to him as he walked from Clifford's Inn, gathered in the harvest of two months spent in Italy, brought trophies of his work and of his loves—Dr. Butler's letters, Miss Savage's little volume on needlework.

As he grew older the reading-room grew dearer and dearer to him. Its habitués were congenial. He did not need to know their names, any more than Madame had needed to know his; yet their faces were familiar, unfrightening, unconfusing. They too were worrying out ideas—quiet, respect-

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able persons, who obeyed the rules, without a protest shut their books when closing time came, were content patiently to wait their turn if the catalogue they happened to want was in use; not writers of popular books, or holders of university chairs, or reviewers, but, like himself, honest turners over of ideas, layers up of post-humous treasure by their steady, unostentatious thinking while alive.

He journeyed to the British Museum summer and winter, through fair and foul weather, as old, ungainly ladies journey each morning to Mass. In the spring he walked happily, in summer perspiring inside his heavy clothes; groped his way through November fogs, trod briskly when it was hard and frosty and horses were falling in the streets; yet always the Museum's great doorway invited, always he climbed willingly up the steps to it, and willingly surrendered his overcoat and hat and umbrella, never was reluctant to leave the streets behind him and wrestle in the twilight of the reading-room with his ideas.

To the Museum authorities he took his troubles and from them sought advice—"Men in high position in the British Museum." Sometimes he was tart about them, for instance about Garnett, especially when he ventured to criticise his book on the Sonnets, but on the whole he trusted their judgment, regarded them as his link with the workaday world, fingers on its pulse, part of it even, yet accessible, able to tell him what he always so wanted to know and yet never managed to know—how he might please, what he should do, how behave, to make his peace.

There was some controversy in the Clifford's



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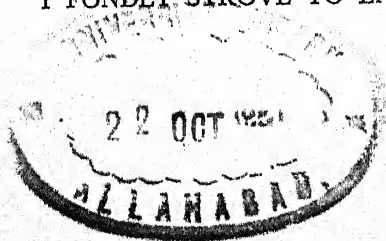
Inn household as to how Butler's ashes should be disposed of. Butler's first idea was that he should be buried at Langar, tainted with Langar while alive and so laid to rest there with a stone with the last of Handel's six fugues traced on it to make the place. Then when he had decided on cremation he wanted his ashes to be scattered over the grass plot in Clifford's Inn. Then it was decided that Mr. Cathie should have the ashes and keep them in a jar on his mantelpiece like tobacco. In the end they were buried in the garden of the Woking Crematorium. It is a pity that just a handful or so of them was not taken into the reading-room of the British Museum, and surreptitiously scattered to collect with other dust on the bookshelves, for in that case the epitaph Higgs found in the courtyard of a musical bank on his return to Erewhon—

I FALL ASLEEP  
IN THE FULL AND CERTAIN HOPE  
THAT MY SLUMBER SHALL NOT BE BROKEN  
AND THAT  
THOUGH I BE ALL-FORGETTING  
YET SHALL I NOT BE ALL-FORGOTTEN  
BUT CONTINUE THAT LIFE  
IN THE THOUGHTS AND DEED OF THOSE I LOVED  
INTO WHICH  
WHILE THE POWER TO STRIVE WAS YET  
VOUCHSAFED ME  
I FONDLY STROVE TO ENTER

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might have been only slightly altered to suit  
Butler himself—

I FALL ASLEEP  
IN THE FULL AND CERTAIN HOPE  
THAT MY SLUMBER SHALL NOT BE BROKEN  
AND THAT  
THOUGH I BE ALL-FORGETTING  
YET SHALL I NOT BE ALL-FORGOTTEN  
BUT, CONTINUE THAT LIFE  
IN THE PAGES OF THE BOOKS I LOVED  
INTO WHICH  
WHILE THE POWER TO STRIVE WAS YET  
VOUCHSAFED ME  
I FONDLY STROVE TO ENTER



THE END

